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- BRIAN GLANVILLE
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- MANO MENEZES

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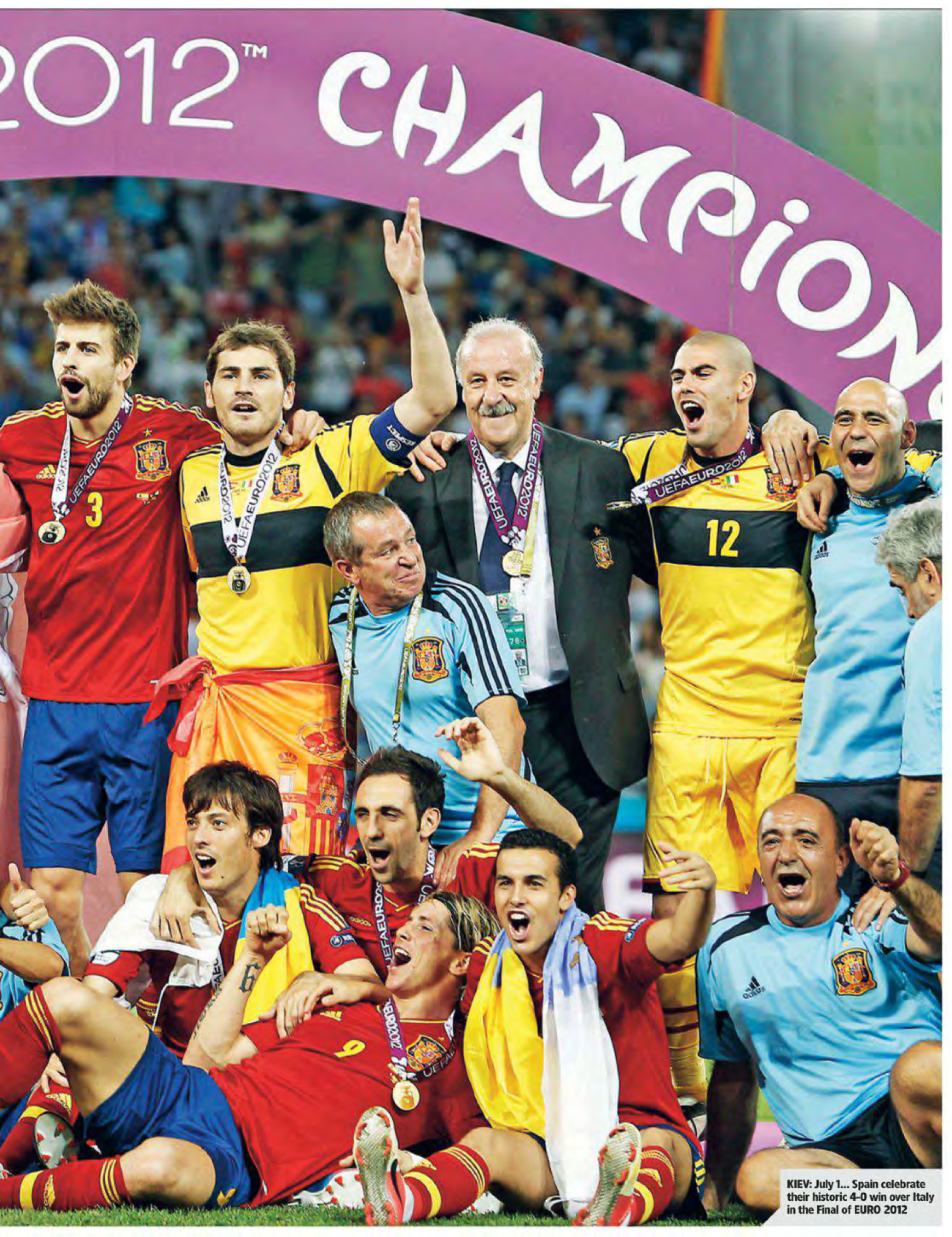
In Pictures

The global game caught on camera



KIEV: July 1... Spain celebrate their historic 4-0 win over Italy in the Final of EURO 2012

DONETSK: June 23... France's Samir Nasri is surrounded by three Spaniards in the quarter-finals

KIEV: June 24...Italy's Andrea Pirlo dinks his penalty over England goalkeeper Joe Hart in the quarter-finals

LVIV: June 13...Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo (white no7) makes a late run to try to breach the Denmark defence in their Group B encounter

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WARSAW: June 16...Giorgios Karagounis' children join in the Greek celebrations after their win over Russia

KIEV: June 19...Sweden fans relax prior to their Group D match v France

KIEV: June 11...Ukraine's Yevhen Selin wins the ball watched by Sweden's Zlatan Ibrahimovic

PICTURES OF THE MONTH QR CODE

To see more of the best photos from the month, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the images by logging on to bit.ly/zOMWBT

FROM THE EDITOR

Euro 2012 was a tournament that defied national stereotypes. England showed humility and caution; Italy attacked with ambition; Germany showed vulnerability; and Spain, the perennial losers, won a record third consecutive major title, the first country to do so.

Spain's breathtaking display in the Final was a fitting finale to a wonderful tournament. Inevitably, Spain have earned plaudits as one of the greatest, possibly the greatest, teams of all time. It's a debate that will continue on these pages in the coming weeks and months.

Hopefully this edition of *World Soccer* will serve as a record of a superb three weeks in Poland and Ukraine. It's important to record the tournament's great moments as we are unlikely to witness its like again.

In four years time, in France, the Euros will be expanded to 24 teams and the "symmetry" of a 16-team finals, with high-quality finalists and tightly-fought groups, will be lost.

The European Championship is in danger of going the same way as the World Cup: bloated by commercialism, with fans patronised by kick-off "countdowns" and the "Disneyfication" of football.

> The European Championship is in danger of going the way of the World Cup: bloated by commercialism and the "Disneyfication" of football

The proposal from Michel Platini (page 12) to spread the European Championship around "12 or more" European cities in 2020 is an intriguing idea, but one fraught with danger. It may seem an attractive solution to the problem of the vast majority of UEFA members being unable to host an expanded tournament. But, once again, fans will lose out.

In Poland and Ukraine, the UEFA executive spent rather more time in executive airport lounges than with fans on 15-hour train journeys. Platini's proposal will rip the heart and soul out of the European Championship as an international football event. Maybe such "progress" is inevitable but Euro 2012 may prove to be a high watermark for the European game.

There are many signs that Spain could dominate for years to come. In this issue (page 70), we also preview the Olympics football tournament, where Spain's reigning European under-21 champions, will start as one of the favourites.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

THE WORLD THIS MONTH

Passionate...Polish fans get behind their team

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1. Spain win the European Championship after a stunning defeat of Italy in Kiev ..... Page 20
2. Michel Platini proposes a radical new plan for the European Championship in 2020 ..... Page 12
3. Ukraine "ghost goal" proves timely with Goal-line Technology being discussed by IFAB ..... Page 50
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5. Mario Balotelli scores the goal of the tournament as Italy knock out Germany ..... Page 62
6. Russia hooligans clash with Polish riot police in Warsaw ..... Page 38
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8. Recriminations as France lose to Spain in the Euro 2012 quarter-final ..... Page 58
9. Tahiti win the OFC Nations Cup after New Zealand are stunned by New Caledonia ..... Page 102
10. Boca Juniors and Fluminense contest the Libertadores Cup Final ..... Page 100

"He's like a child, who, standing on tiptoes, finally is tall enough to reach the light switch and now wants to turn it on and off every time he passes"

Italian daily *La Repubblica* aptly describes the eccentric, diva-like behaviour of Mario Balotelli

ISRAEL

International ends 83-day hunger strike

Support...protestors hold a pro-Sarsak poster

Palestine midfielder Mahmoud Sarsak, who was on hunger strike for 83 days in protest at being held in an Israeli jail without charge, agreed to resume eating in exchange for his early release.

Sarsak, 25, had been detained for three years after Israeli officials accused him of being involved with Islamic Jihad. He was arrested in July 2009 at a crossing between his native Gaza and Israel on his way to the West Bank, where he was due to play for Palestine in an international match.

He began a hunger strike in protest against his detention under Israel's "unlawful combatants law". Two other players – Omar Abu Rois and Mohammed Nimr – are also being detained in Israeli jails without trial.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter has expressed his "grave concern" over "the alleged illegal detention" of Palestinian players and called on the Israeli Football Association to draw the attention of its country's authorities to the issue.

John Holmesdale

HEROES & VILLAINS

BELGIUM FANS

Without a team of their own to support at Euro 2012, a group of Belgians sold their support on e-bay to raise money for UNICEF.

LUKAS PODOLSKI

The Germany striker became the youngest European player to reach 100 caps for his country when he played – and scored – against Denmark at the age of 27 years and 13 days. South Korea's former winger Cha Bum-kun holds the world record at 24 years and 139 days.

Reason to celebrate...Podolski

TAHITI

Broke the 39-year duopoly of Australia and New Zealand to become the first team outside these two to win the OFC Nations Cup when they defeated New Caledonia, who were the conquerors of New Zealand in the semi-finals, 1-0 in the Final, and secured a berth at next year's Confederations Cup in Brazil.

ARSENAL SARANDI

The Avellaneda club won their first-ever Argentinian championship when they beat Belgrano 1-0 on the final day of the season.

Title time...Arsenal Sarandi

LEVAN KOBIASHVILI

The Hertha Berlin midfielder was banned for seven-and-a-half months for punching referee Wolfgang Stark following his side's defeat by Fortuna Dusseldorf in the Bundesliga relegation/promotion play-off.

Wrong move...Kobiashvili

CHINESE FA

Former federation president Nan Young and predecessor Xie Yalong were both jailed for 10 years and six months for taking bribes.

SAMIR NASRI

The France midfielder swore at journalists after last-eight defeat by Spain at Euro 2012.

ISTVAN VAD

The Hungarian goal-line assistant for the England v Ukraine game who, with the best view of anyone inside the Donbass Arena, demonstrated why goal-line technology will be introduced sooner rather than later.

Nothing doing...Vad failed to spot Ukraine goal

MAJED NASSER

The controversial Al Wasl goalkeeper has been suspended by his club for the entire 2012-13 season following a red card for butting an opponent in a defeat by Al Muharraq.

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WINNERS

PREMIER LEAGUE
The English top flight signed a new £3.018bn TV contract which runs for three seasons starting in 2013-14.

RIVER PLATE
The Buenos Aires giants were promoted back to the Argentinian top flight a year after being relegated.

CORINTHIANS
Reached their first-ever Libertadores Cup Final when they beat reigning champions and fellow Brazilian club Santos in the semi-final.

LOSERS

DAVID BECKHAM
The 37-year-old former England captain was left out of the Team GB squad for the Olympic Games.

HOLLAND
World Cup runners-up in 2010, they exited Euro 2012 having lost all three group matches at a tournament for the first time in their history.

SULLEY MUNTARI
Ghana midfielder, due to leave Internazionale for Milan, will be out for five months after being injured playing football on the beach.

"When I spoke they did understand me. But every now and then, when I tried to explain tactics, things didn't work out. Maybe it's because Rooney doesn't speak English. He doesn't understand English"

Former England manager Fabio Capello explains his communication problems with key players

GOALS we'd like to see again

1 LIONEL MESSI
Argentina v Ecuador
After dribbling from the halfway line, he plays a neat one-two with Gonzalo Higuain before scoring with a first-time finish past the Ecuador goalkeeper Alexander Dominguez.

2 JAKUB BLASZCZYKOWSKI
Poland v Russia
Receives a slide-rule pass before cutting between two defenders and unleashing a left-foot shot beyond the keeper.

3 LIONEL MESSI
Argentina v Brazil
Another dribble, this time from the right flank, ends with a curling shot into the far corner to complete his hat-trick.

4 ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC
Sweden v France
Technically perfect turn and volley from just inside the penalty area to set Sweden on their way to their only win at Euro 2012.

5 DAVID TREZEGUET
River Plate v Almirante Brown
The former France forward, who is now 34, meets a headed pass on the edge of the penalty area with a finely placed left-foot volley into the bottom corner as River win the Argentinian second division title and secure promotion to the top flight.

6 ROMARINHO
Corinthians v Palmeiras
A neat one-touch passing move is finished off by a clever backheel from the 21-year-old Brazilian striker.

GOALS WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN
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"There are five referees on the pitch and the ball is 50cm behind the goal line. Write what you want. You've seen it"

Ukraine coach Oleg Blokhin offers advice to journalists after his side's "phantom goal" against England

UEFA

Platini springs major surprise on the hosting of Euro 2020

Michel Platini was performing like a conjuror in Kiev on the eve of the Euro 2012 Final, pulling a rabbit out of a hat to the surprise of a media audience.

Pulling off that particular trick is some feat and the European football federation's president clearly enjoyed it.

The "rabbit" was his proposal to scrap the centrally-staged European Championship finals and to stage matches in more than a dozen cities all over the continent instead.

Euro 2012 was played out with 16 teams but UEFA is already committed to 24 for the next tournament, to be held in France in 2016. Now, however, it has been suggested that, due to the present economic climate, the demands on any would-be host nation have become too intimidating.

This came home sharply to UEFA earlier this year when it had to cajole bids to host Euro 2020 from its membership and has so far come up with expressions of interest from Turkey, a joint bid from Azerbaijan and Georgia, and a three-way approach from the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Revolutionary idea

Significantly, none of Europe's major football nations showed any interest; hence Platini has come up with his revolutionary idea of dismantling the centrally hosted finals and spreading the matches around.

"This is an idea I came up with a while ago and the executive committee gave me permission to ask the national federations to think about not having a European Championship in one country but to have the matches all over Europe in 2020," said the Frenchman. "This is just an idea at this stage.

"We should work on the idea and we will have a meeting with all the federations in December or January and make a decision. We could have one country with 12 different host cities or have it in 12 or 13 cities all over Europe.

"I really feel passionately about this. The majority of the executive committee think it's a good idea and believe we should have a good think about it.

"For example, it would be easier from the standpoint of expenditure. It's easier if you have one stadium per host city. That's all we can say because the idea only came to my mind a while ago.

"We've not decided anything yet but it's very important."

Platini's suggestion revealed UEFA's dissatisfaction at the nature of the expressions of interest in 2020 but appeared to fly in the face of what he had listed as the powerful legacy Euro 2012 would be leaving to the nations and peoples of Poland and Ukraine.

Important...Platini's idea will be discussed by the federations

Other decisions announced:

- Cardiff's Millennium Stadium and Tbilisi's Mikheil Meskhi Stadium will host the UEFA Super Cup in 2014 and 2015.
- A two-year trial of a new UEFA youth club competition at under-19 level will start from 2013-14.

Keir Radnedge

OBITUARIES

Northern Ireland stalwart...McDonald

Alan McDONALD (1963-2012)
The former Northern Ireland captain, who played nearly 500 games for Queens Park Rangers and coached Glentoran to the IFA Premiership in 2009, collapsed and died while playing golf.

Miki ROQUE (1988-2012)
Real Betis defender who was in Liverpool's FA Youth Cup-winning team in 2006 died of cancer.

Record...Preciado

Manuel PRECIADO (1957-2012)
The former Sporting Gijon coach died of a heart attack the day after agreeing to take charge of Villarreal. His record of 232 games in charge at Sporting is second only to Jose Manuel Diaz Novoa with 282.

Alketas PANAGOULIAS (1934-2012)
Coached his native Greece to their first major international tournament, the 1980 European Championship in Italy, and their first World Cup finals, in 1994. He was in charge of USA between 1983 and 1985.

Ramaz SHENGELIA (1957-2012)
Soviet Union player of the year in 1978 and 1981, the Georgian striker won the Soviet Supreme League in 1978 and European Cup-winners Cup in 1981 with Dinamo Tbilisi. He won 26 Soviet Union caps, scoring 10 goals.

Tussle...Shengelia (left) up against Brazil at 1982 World Cup

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

It's time to rid football of the goal-line Scrooges

The farce of Ukraine's "phantom" Euro goal against England led to much hilarity round this way.

Apologies to all Ukrainians, but there can really be only one sane response to the naked absurdity of the situation conjured up by UEFA's intrepid Hungarian officiating trio; that sane response being to hurl yourself to the ground and thrash about in uncontrollable hysteria.

I mean, here we have the now-famous Hungarian additional assistant referee, HAAR, feet planted exactly where they should be, his whole body language a study in ferocious, almost theatrical, concentration, as he intensely watches the ball come sailing into the goal. And you know what's going through his mind, over and over again...those words from the rule book insisting that "the whole of the ball" must be across the goal line.

Which is where the hilarity starts. The whole of the ball. Not more than one second's thought is necessary to understand that this is ridiculous. So, even when 99.9 per cent of the ball has crossed the line, it's not a goal. Even 99.99 per cent is not a goal.

It is that sort of microscopic judgment that the HAAR was making – indeed, evidently believed he had managed to pull off as he remained, apparently paralysed, staring blindly ahead. And by not signalling the goal for Ukraine monumentally screwed up the very thing he was supposed to get right.

The rule book evidently believes that scientific accuracy is possible here. It says "the whole" of the ball – not "most" of the ball, or "99 per cent" of the ball; it must be all the ball. So we're in the world of the "angstrom", which is a millionth of a millimetre. At some moment during the motion of the ball into the goal it must be an angstrom that defines when "the whole of the ball" has crossed the line.

Possibly the long-awaited goal-line technology (GLT) – at enormous expense, no doubt – will deal with the angstroms. But I doubt it. Such precision is not needed anyway. The boffins can set their goal-meter at whatever point they like. Let's say they decide to allow one centimetre of "play". Well, who's going to care? What we would then expect is that GLT, wherever employed – which, let's remind ourselves, would be in precious few locations – would at least give consistent decisions.

But the biggest problem in all of this is the incredibly mean-spirited, anti-goal attitude of football's rules. How else to describe a rule that will annul a goal for the sake of an angstrom?

The origin of this "whole of the ball" notion is suspicious anyway. It seems to owe more to grammar than to playing reality. An English FA memorandum in 1886 noted that because the rule said "a goal shall be won when the ball has passed between the goal posts", this use of the past tense must mean that a goal cannot be scored until the whole ball has passed over the line.

> The origin of this "whole of the ball over the goal-line" notion is suspicious, anyway. It seems to owe more to grammar than playing reality

While the virtually moribund IFAB ponders, dithers and delays over the technological terrors of GLT, it could instead take a look at Rule 10 where, with a slight change in the wording, it could effect a huge change in its own Scrooge-like attitude to the fun and enjoyment that goals bring to the game.

All it must do is to alter "the whole of the ball passes over the goal line" to "any part of the ball passes over the goal line." And to those – Scrooges, all of 'em – who will accuse me of merely exchanging pro-defence errors for pro-goalscoring errors, I happily plead guilty. The distances cannot be measured anyway.

So, in the interests of a more exciting and entertaining game, let the phantom angstroms be on the side of the goalscorers. WS

"Cristiano Ronaldo isn't the second best player in the world, he is the 12th. The first 11 are Barca players"

Barcelona president Sandro Rosell stokes the Messi-Ronaldo rivalry

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

New Turk...Kuyt

EUROPE

MARC WILMOTS was handed a permanent deal as Belgium's national coach until after the 2014 World Cup. He took charge of the team's friendlies against Macedonia and England in a caretaker capacity following the resignation of Georges Leekens.

Belgium midfielder **EDEN HAZARD** joined Chelsea from Lille for a reported £32million – the biggest fee ever paid to a Ligue 1 club. Lille replaced him with Sochaux's French Euro 2012 midfielder **MARVIN MARTIN**.

Croatia midfielder **NIKO KRANJCAR** joined Ukrainian side Dynamo Kiev from Tottenham Hotspur on a four-year contract. Defender **VEDRAN CORLUKA** left Tottenham to join recently departed Croatia national coach Slaven Bilic in Russia at Lokomotiv Moscow.

Internazionale signed Argentinian striker **RODRIGO PALACIO** from Genoa for around £9m, while **GORAN PANDEV** left Inter and made his loan to Napoli permanent in a £6.4m deal.

Holland striker **DIRK KUYT** joined Fenerbahce from Liverpool for £1m.

Having won the Champions League and FA Cup, Chelsea gave caretaker manager **ROBERTO DI MATTEO** a permanent deal. He replaced Andre Villas-Boas for the last 11 weeks of the season.

BRENDAN RODGERS left Swansea City to become manager of Liverpool, while **PAUL LAMBERT** quit Norwich City to take over at Aston Villa. **MICHAEL LAUDRUP** replaced Rodgers at Swansea, while Birmingham City's **CHRIS HUGHTON** replaced Lambert at Norwich. **STEVE CLARKE** was appointed coach of West Bromwich Albion.

In Serie A, **ZDENEK ZEMAN**, who led Pescara to promotion last season, returned to take charge at Roma. **GIOVANNI STROPPA** replaced him at the top-flight newcomers. Lazio replaced Edy Reja with **VLADIMIR PETKOVIC** and Palermo appointed **GIUSEPPE SANNINO**, formerly of Siena. **SERSE COSMI** took over at Siena and **VINCENZO MONTELLA** joined Fiorentina.

Former Liverpool and Aston Villa manager **GERARD HOULLIER** joined last year's Austrian champions Salzburg as the club's global sports director. **RALF RANGNICK**, who quit Schalke in September last year citing exhaustion, was named sporting director, while **ROGER SCHMIDT** replaced Ricardo Moniz as coach.

Alcorcon coach **JUAN ANTONIO ANQUELA** replaced Abel Resino at La Liga side Granada.

LANDRY CHAUVIN of French Ligue 2 club Nantes took charge of top-flight side Brest. **ALEX DUPONT**, who was sacked by Brest five games before the end of the season, replaced Olivier Pantaloni at Ajaccio.

JAN URBAN replaced Maciej Skorza as coach of Legia Warsaw.

Austria Vienna named **PETER STOGER** as coach.

Former Italy midfielder **GENNARO GATTUSO** joined Swiss club Sion on a two-year deal from Milan.

JOHN MCGLYNN was appointed manager of last season's Scottish Cup winners Heart of Midlothian.

Danish choice...Jacobs

ARIEL JACOBS was appointed coach of Danish club Copenhagen after leading Anderlecht to last season's Belgium title. He is replaced by **JOHN VAN DEN BROM**.

LEONARDO JARDIM, who led Braga to third place in the Portuguese league last season, took over at Greek champions Olympiakos, while AEK Athens appointed former player **VANGELIS VLACHOS** as their new coach. **DUSAN BAJEVIC**, who won eight Greek league titles as boss of AEK and Olympiakos, took charge of Atromitos, who lost **GIORGOS DONIS** to PAOK.

MARTIN RUEDA was unveiled as the new coach of Young Boys, whose midfielder **DAVID DEGEN** was reunited with his twin brother Philipp after returning to his old club Basle on a three-year contract

AFRICA

Cameroon appointed **DENIS LAVAGNE** as national coach, replacing Javier Clemente who was sacked for failing to qualify for the African Nations Cup. Lavagne had been caretaker since October.

Serb **ZORAN DJORDJEVIC**, who was previously in charge of the Philippines' under-23 side, became the first coach of South Sudan's national team since they gained independence.

Moving...Ronaldinho

Roni quits Fla and joins rival

RONALDINHO quit Flamengo following an argument over unpaid wages. Four days later, he moved to fellow Brazilian top-flight side Atletico Mineiro, reportedly on a much lower salary.

"At the moment we have the best teams here, but there are great teams who are not – such as Switzerland, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Slovenia and Norway. The Scots are also not here"

UEFA's tournament director Martin Kallen, defends the plan to expand the Euros to 24 teams

Appointments, sackings and loans

Swedish coach **LARS-OLOF MATTSSON** was put in charge of Sierra Leone.

CONCACAF

Former England centre-forward **PAUL MARINER** replaced Aron Winter as coach of MLS side Toronto. He had previously been the Canadian club's director of player development.

New boss...Mariner

ASIA

Chinese club Shanghai Shenhua appointed former Argentina boss **SERGIO BATISTA** as coach and signed Ivory coast captain **DIDIER DROGBA** from Chelsea and Colombia midfielder **GIOVANNI MORENO** from Racing of Argentina.

Chinese start...Batista

India named **WIM KOEVERMANS** as their new national coach.

ANTOINE KOMBOUARE, who was sacked by Paris Saint-Germain in December, was appointed coach of Saudi club Al Hilal.

EUROPE

Milan defender **MASSIMO ODDO** announced his retirement at the age of 35. A member of Italy's 2006 World Cup-winning squad, he spent last season on loan at Serie A side Lecce. Nantes' former France and Arsenal striker **SYLVAIN WILTORD** also retired, aged 38.

Young scorer...Vonlanthen

Switzerland's **JOHAN VONLANTHEN**, the youngest goalscorer at a European Championship with his effort at Euro 2004 aged 18 years and 137 days, has given up playing at 26.

SOUTH AMERICA

Estudiantes playmaker **JUAN SEBASTIAN VERON**, who won 73 caps for Argentina, retired aged 37.

Paraguay sacked coach **FRANCISCO ARCE** after a poor start to the 2014 World Cup qualifiers, in which the side took just four points from their opening five games.

Poor start...Arce

CONCACAF

Philadelphia Union dismissed coach **PETER NOWAK** following a poor start to the MLS season.

AFRICA

Kenya fired national coach **FRANCIS KIMANZI** who had been in charge since November.

Kaizer Chiefs defender **TINASHE NENGOMASHA** announced he was leaving the club after a decade of service and 324 appearances.

ASIA

Australia international **HARRY KEWELL** quit A-League side Melbourne Victory and returned to England for family reasons.

Nine-time Iranian champions Persepolis, who were 12th last season and are out of the Champions League, parted company with coach **MUSTAFA DENIZLI.**

UAE club Al Jazira sacked Brazilian coach **CAIO JUNIOR** and released Australia captain **LUCAS NEILL**.

Family...Kewell

Redknapp sacked by Spurs

Forty-four days after being overlooked for the England manager's job, **HARRY REDKNAPP** was sacked by Tottenham Hotspur.

Gone...Redknapp has left Tottenham

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

King of Europe...Platini (right) watches Poland's European Championship group match against Russia in Warsaw with the country's president Bronislaw Komorowski

Platini: undoubted star but flawed administrator

Joao Havelange was a monstrosity, Sepp Blatter a little less bad. So what of Michel Platini? As eventual president of FIFA, the position he covets, he probably wouldn't be as bad as either of them and probably a good deal more honest.

Yes, he has made a number of abysmal mistakes since he became president of UEFA. He supported the ludicrous and deeply suspect choice of Qatar as the 2022 World Cup venue, then compounded that fatuity by suggesting that the European competitions abandon their winter programme to help Qatar stage the World Cup. I don't doubt for a moment that these bizarre positions were taken up in all mistaken honesty – which hardly makes them any the less outrageous.

At the European Championship finals, Platini boasted of the nine goals he had scored for France in 1984. But what of it? We are now concerned with Platini, the flawed administrator, not Platini the undoubted football star.

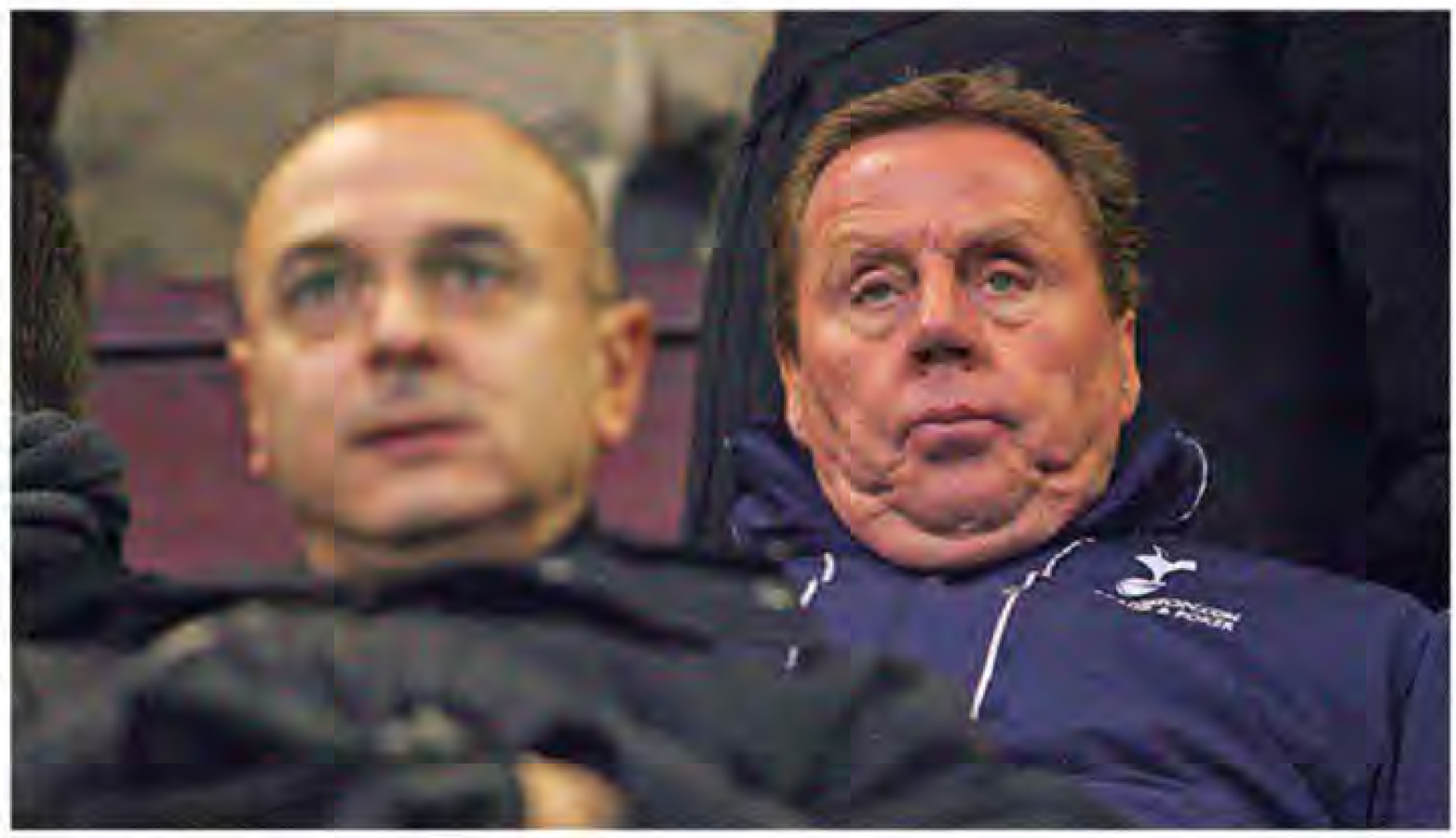
At UEFA, he has inflicted us with the abysmally drawn out, far flung and increasingly tedious Europa League competition. Now he will impose on the European Championship, in four years' time, the idiocy of a 24-team finals tournament, something he has allegedly espoused because it brought him useful votes from lesser footballing countries.

> [Platini] will impose on the European Championship, in four years' time, the idiocy of a 24-team finals tournament

His plan to limit the expenditure of clubs competing in Europe looks good, until you realise the probable consequence would be to prevent the now lesser clubs from increasing their ambitions.

Still, so long as FIFA exists in anything like its present form what hope is there of any true moral or organisational progress?

And remember that, whatever you think of greedy Havelange, who now may face proceedings over the bribes offered by ISL, he stayed scandalously in office, virtually unopposed, between 1974 and



1998. A judgement less on himself and depredations than on the member countries, not least Britain's, which were quite happy to keep him in power.

Platini duly blundered again, declaring he would support a Turkish bid for the 2020 bloated Euro finals without bothering to find out that the Turkish government isn't supporting the bid. Where next? To Georgia? Azerbaijan? A situation caused by Platini's indecent haste.

Harry's luck runs out

It still seems daft to me that Tottenham Hotspur got rid of Harry Redknapp, whatever his somewhat imperious contractual demands and the recruitment of as conflicted an agent as Paul Stretford. But how, and how very quickly, are the mighty fallen?

Yes, Spurs may have gone into a transient decline, from which they emerged, late last season. Yes, Harry in the League Cup Final against Chelsea got his selection badly wrong in choosing the vulnerable, ageing William Gallas. But Harry it surely was who reinvigorated Spurs, turning Gareth Bale from a moderate left-back into a devastating left winger, bringing the best out of that superbly gifted little Croatian playmaker Luca Modric, and getting the European better of the two Milanese giants, Internazionale and Milan.

Follow that, you might say, to whoever succeeds Redknapp.

It does seem almost inexplicable, though, that Harry, for weeks the choice of the nation's fans as future England manager, when there was reportedly a four-year Tottenham contract to sign, should suddenly be out on his ear. Luck, which some felt he had in his criminal trial for tax evasion, had suddenly deserted him completely.

Along with countless thousands of others, I was delighted when he was exonerated in court in a case which was somewhat baffling. A case that arguably cost the prosecution vastly too much, but which they seemed set to win when it transpired that he had transferred a large sum of money to a bank in Monaco in the name of his dog – who, being dead, was plainly unable to testify.

In the end, it apparently came down to the jury deciding when he was telling the truth. Harry proclaimed in court that he was lying to the *News of the World* when he appeared to incriminate himself, but telling the truth in court when he pleaded innocence. An aggressive prosecution insisted it was the other way round; the jury demurred.

Drifting apart... Redknapp (right) was at odds with Levy

> One suspects at the bottom of Harry's dismissal lay the evident antipathy between he and chairman Daniel Levy

One suspects that at the bottom of his dismissal by Spurs, for whom he achieved so much and was so unlucky not to take the team into Europe next season, thanks to Chelsea's astonishing European Cup win, lay the evident antipathy between he and Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy.

Harry, with his public pronouncements, hardly did anything to improve that relationship, but I still believe it was wrong and counter productive to let him go. Time, no doubt, will tell.

England's "up and under" approach

Blessed are the playmakers. If you can find them. Spain can, in abundance. The gloriously elusive and inventive Andres Iniesta, the elegant Xavi, and Xabi Alonso, who Rafa Benitez so foolishly and pettily allowed to leave Liverpool.

Then there is Luka Modric, of course so unlucky to be on the losing Croatia side against lucky Spain, Italy's Andrea Pirlo, whom Milan mindlessly allowed to leave them for Juventus, and Mesut Ozil of Germany.

But, the eternally-injured Jack Wilshere sadly apart, England have nobody. All the infinite millions paid to English players have done nothing to produce successors to Paul Gascoigne, Glenn Hoddle, Trevor Brooking, and before them, with his unerring left foot, Johnny Haynes.

You wonder whether this sad famine has anything to do with the arid years of Charlie Hughes when he was so disastrously in charge of FA coaching.

His so-called "Position of Maximum Opportunity", allegedly achieved by long balls, was in fact, with its blatant cutting out of the middle man, nothing new in English football. It simply resurrected the 1950s airborne theories put forward by Charles Reep, which were eagerly espoused by Stan Cullis when he was the manager of Wolverhampton Wanderers.

English football has always been liable to fall pray to the "up and under". Four days before Austria met England in a fascinating match at Stamford Bridge in 1932, Jimmy Hogan, the famous little Lancastrian who helped Hugo Meisl coach the Austrian national team to unprecedented success, took the team to watch Chelsea play Everton – where they were bemused at the sight of each side kicking long to a celebrated centre-forward, big Dixie Dean of Everton and little Hughie Gallacher of Chelsea.

And so it still seems to go. Hughes, after all, left behind him a coterie of misdirected young coaching disciples, who took his confused words as Gospel.

Does the malady linger on? WS

Direct...Carroll bids to reach a cross during England's Euro 2012 defeat by Italy

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SPAIN V ITALY

History in the making

Spain gave Italy a footballing masterclass as they became the first country to win three major trophies in a row. Keir Radnedge reports from Kiev

UEFAEURO2012
4
16
22

SPAIN V ITALY

JULY 1 – KIEV

SPAIN 4
ITALY 0
HT: 2-0. Att: 63,170. Ref: Proenca (Por)

Football teams, players and coaches achieve records in a mix of manners, with too few of them inspiring. More often than not, the ultimate goal or point or title is ground out, to leave a fragment or more of dissatisfaction.

This, happily, cannot be said about Spain's triumph in the 2012 European Championship finals in Poland and Ukraine. A 4-0 Final demolition of the opposition leaves little room for argument. Sympathy was due to beaten Italy who had both surprised and impressed up until their fateful appearance in Kiev's Olympic Stadium; then, all of a sudden, everything went wrong all at once.

Hence Vicente Del Bosque presides, in his avuncular fashion, over a squad of record-makers and a real team in the fullest sense.

Outsiders have seen the claws come out when Barcelona play Real Madrid and presume it impossible that such battlegrounds can be abandoned so easily when the national team comes calling. In fact, as captain Iker Casillas and playmaker Xavi once noted in conversation during Euro 2012 they have played together for Spain, on all the rungs of the age-group ladder, for far longer than they have been jousting in La Liga or the Champions League.

Hearing them talk put me in mind of Morten Olsen's comment back in the days when, as captain of an emergent Denmark, he had said: "We are not only team-mates, we are mostly friends.

"And you run harder and work harder for your friends than people who are only your colleagues."

Spain certainly run. Their movement frightened France boss Laurent Blanc into tactical and selection suicide; their movement so consumed Portugal into confrontation that Joao Moutinho and company did not have the time to prepare enough bullets for Cristiano Ronaldo to fire; and, in the Final, that natural mixture of pace and technique ripped the legs off an Italy side appeared worn to a semi-standstill merely from the effort of singing their national anthem.

Spain thus became:

• The only national team ever to raise three major trophies in a row.

• The only nation to retain the European title.

• Equalled Germany's record of three Euro titles.

• Outstripped the 3-0 record winning margin with which West Germany beat the Soviet Union in the 1972 Final.

• Turned Del Bosque into the first coach to win World Cup, European Championship and Champions League.

• Saw Fernando Torres become the first player to score in two Euro finals.

• Saw Torres and Chelsea club-mate Juan Mata join the handful of players to become a European champion at club and national team level in the same season – fellow Spaniard Luis Suarez was the first in 1964.

Italy therefore ended the 2012 journey as they had begun it. Back in April 2007 they finished a decisive second-best to Poland and Ukraine in the vote among UEFA's executive committee to decide tournament host; now they finished a decisive second-best in the very last match.

Spain's champions of 2008 had evolved into world champions in 2010 and have now been transformed, temporarily, into football immortals courtesy of those goals from David Silva and Jordi Alba in the first half, then from substitutes Torres and Mata in the second.

MAN OF THE MATCH
Xavi (Spain)

Nothing stands still

Temporarily is the word because, while the fireworks were still echoing over central Kiev, Spain's players were being pressed on whether they go on to win the World Cup again and make it four in a row. Del Bosque even volunteered at his post-match press conference that nothing stands still in football and there was a World Cup qualifying tournament ahead as well as the Confederations Cup in Brazil next June.

Many tournament Finals are disappointments – the 2010 World Cup Final was rendered gruesomely ugly by frightened Holland. Credit to Italy. The *Azzurri* respected Spain but were not afraid of them. Prandelli was not tempted to tinker with a winning formula, as Joachim Low had with his Germany side in the semi-final against Italy.

Italy set forth intending to take the game to the champions. This was, perhaps, the defining measure of Spain's magnificence: they stood up to what Italy were prepared to throw at them – and threw it all back with four-goal interest.

The twin giants of Latin Europe had met in their very first game at these finals when they settled for a 1-1 draw up in Gdansk in the north-west of Poland.

That was the only goal Casillas conceded in theses finals and he remains unbeaten in knock-out matches

Crowded out...Italy's Balotelli finds no way through Spain's defence

Pressure...Spain hunt down Cassano

in all three title tournaments.

Spain maintained their pursuit of glory with the preference for possession over penetration. Hence Barcelona midfielder Cesc Fabregas was once more the so-called "false nine" in a team without a recognised striker.

Italy, meanwhile, maintained a more traditional appearance with four defenders, Andrea Pirlo hanging deep to use that space as playmaker and young tyro Mario Balotelli and old fox Antonio Cassano up front.

As their goalkeeper-captain Gianluigi Buffon had conceded before the game, Italy were the surprise team of the Euros; not only because they had never been favoured to reach the Final but because

TRIPLE ARGUMENT

Last goal...Zidane

Uruguay may well dispute Spain's claim to being the first international side to win three consecutive major tournaments – the South Americans won gold at the Olympics Games in 1924 and 1928, and then followed that up with victory in the 1930 World Cup.

Spain haven't conceded a goal in the knockout stage of a major tournament for over six years – since Zinedine Zidane scored against them for France in the 2006 World Cup round of 16.

MATCH DETAILS

SPAIN 4 — **ITALY 0**

Scorers: Silva 14, Alba 41, Torres 84, Mata 88

Team: Casillas – Arbeloa, Pique, Ramos, Alba – Busquets, Xavi, Alonso – Silva (Pedro ▶59), Fabregas (Torres ▶75), Iniesta (Mata ▶87)

Booked: Pique

Team: Buffon – Abate, Barzagli, Bonucci, Chiellini (Balzaretti ▶21) – Pirlo – Marchisio, Montolivo (Motta ▶57), De Rossi – Balotelli, Cassano (Di Natale ▶46)

Booked: Barzagli

52%	POSSESSION	48%
14	GOAL ATTEMPTS	11
3	CORNERS	3

of the positive nature of their football, defying the old catenaccio stereotype.

Also, of course, the Italians were defying the scandal-ridden image of a domestic game staggering from one match-fixing scandal to another.

But the new, albeit fatigue-ridden, Italy never had a chance against the old, commanding Spain. Del Bosque's men appeared to have twice as many men in midfield and that paid off with the all-important early goal which led to the sinking of the *Azzurri*.

Sergio Ramos thumped a free-kick and then a header from a corner over the bar; a delicate slice of high-pace passing between Xabi Alonso and Fabregas ended with Xavi firing narrowly over; then Xavi started the move, carried on by Andres Iniesta, for a Fabregas cutback which Silva headed home.

Erratic passing

Italy, behind for the first time in these finals, sought to press back but their passing was erratic. Pirlo, stifled by Fabregas, could not find space or time and a further disruption hit them with a hamstring injury which forced the substitution of left-back Giorgio Chiellini.

To their credit, Italy dug in. Cassano, moving relentlessly in search of a gap, had short-range and long-range shots saved by Casillas. But then Xavi played a wonderful pass for left-back Jordi Alba to sprint on to and score a hugely important first international goal.

Spain should have had a penalty when a Ramos header was clearly blocked by the upraised arm of centre-back Leonardo Bonucci. The incident occurred in front of the goal-line assistant but, as in the Ukraine-England game, he proved of no value.

Italy brought on Antonio Di Natale for Cassano at half-time and he proved a danger. He headed narrowly over the bar inside the first minute of the second half then popped in a close-range shot which drew a sharp stop from Casillas.

The game as a contest was effectively over before the hour mark as Italy, bringing on Thiago Motta for Riccardo Montolivo, saw their third and final substitute depart two minutes later after pulling a hamstring.

With Italy down to 10 men for the rest of the evening it was game over even before Xavi slipped Spain substitute Fernando Torres in for a third goal in the 84th minute. Torres – now the three-goal joint tournament top scorer – duly turned provider for the even-more recently arrived Mata.

Whatever may be said of Euro 2012, it came up not only with the right winners but with stylish and decisive winners.

That is the magnificent memory which will linger. And the image of football is all the better for it. WS

The key moments

10min
One-two on the edge of the area between Xavi and Cesc Fabregas, Xavi shoots over.

14min
GOAL! David Silva gives Spain the lead. A great pass from Andres Iniesta finds Fabregas, who reaches the byline before cutting back to Silva who keeps his balance to head in.

16min
Spain keeper Iker Casillas punches away Andrea Pirlo's inviting corner.

21min
Italy's Giorgio Chiellini limps off with an injured hamstring, to be replaced by Federico Balzaretti.

27min
A decent move by Italy and the ball reaches Balzaretti, whose cross is aimed at Mario Balotelli – but Casillas is quickly off his line to snuff out the danger.

33min
Pirlo sets up Antonio Cassano, who unleashes a powerful drive that Casillas parries away.

41min
GOAL! Balotelli loses the ball and Spain break. Jordi Alba makes a run from deep and Xavi finds him with a beautifully weighted pass. The defender takes one touch before slotting past Gianluigi Buffon.

46min
Antonio Di Natale is on for Italy, with Cassano making way, and almost has an immediate impact. Ignazio Abate clips in a cross which Di Natale heads just over.

48min
Silva feeds the overlapping Fabregas and he cuts infield, beats two defenders before toe-poking the ball straight at Buffon.

49min
Spain appeal for a penalty when Sergio Ramos' header from a corner is blocked by Leonardo Bonucci's arm.

51min
Great chance for Italy as Riccardo Montolivo plays in Di Natale, just onside and unmarked eight yards out, but Casillas saves brilliantly.

57min
Thiago Motta replaces Montolivo. Italy's third and final substitution.

59min
Silva makes way for Pedro.

60min
Motta, who has just come on, goes down clutching his hamstring and is carried off.

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75min
Fernando Torres replaces Fabregas.

84min
GOAL! Torres wraps it up for Spain. He collects another lovely through ball from Xavi and calmly strokes it past Buffon.

87min
Juan Mata replaces Andres Iniesta.

88min
GOAL! The substitute Mata adds the fourth. Torres, through on goal, produces a clever reverse pass into the path of his Chelsea team-mate, and Mata rolls the ball into the empty net.

WHAT THEY SAID

Vicente Del Bosque

"We're talking about a great generation of footballers. They have roots, and they know how to play together because they come from a country where they learn to play properly. We've done a great job.

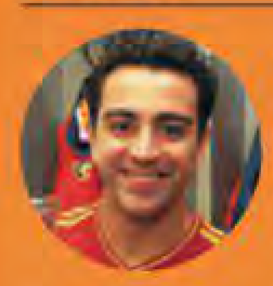
"We have some great lads who play abroad, which was impossible before. We didn't really have players abroad and now foreign clubs want our players, so this is a great era for Spanish football. There is not only one type of football. The important thing is to score goals.

"Our players are very intelligent and we have a very balanced team, we have security in our players. We have strikers but we decided to play with players who went better with our style. This was a very tough opponent but they just didn't have the luck.

"That is why it was so comfortable for us to win this Final. We just played our own game and we were faithful to what we have done in recent years. This success Spanish football has achieved is something historic, now we have to look ahead to qualify for Brazil. With the win in Vienna, Luis Aragones showed us the way and now we just have to go on.

"There will be more challenges, qualification for the World Cup, the Confederations Cup where we will represent Europe and we want to do it well."

Xavi



"This was our best showing at the Euros. We turned in a very complete performance at all times. Today was a good game for me and finally I had a determining role and I managed to come with the passes from deep that hadn't been happening for me in previous games, so I am very happy.

"We are setting the bar very high. People expect continually more from us and always demand we win. it is difficult – yet also a very nice challenge."

Iker Casillas

"This is such a truly wonderful moment. The second goal from Jordi (Alba) clinched it really."

"It's been four marvellous years. You might think that a 4-0 margin against Italy means it was easy – but we have been gradually stepping up as the tournament went along. There will always be some criticism as we have set the bar so high that that's what happens when you come down a pip. We have been able to get the best out of our players and make full use of our characteristics."

Cesare Prandelli

"You can never be happy after a defeat, but the more time goes on, the more the minutes pass, you realise we've had an extraordinary tournament. When I fly over Kiev and see the lights in the stadium, I'll have a little pang of disappointment, but I think we've had a fantastic tournament and I think we'll feel better about it tomorrow.

"They made history and deservedly – they have a lot of players who are tried and tested at this level and even though they don't play with a classic striker they certainly cause you plenty of problems. We played against them in the group stage and I thought we were excellent in that first game because we were 100 percent fit. Against a team like Spain I think you really need to be good in the tackle and above all fit, they totally dominated this evening and we have to congratulate a great side for their victory.

"I think we have had a terrific European championships, the only regret is that we didn't have a few more days to rest up before this game. We came up against a terrific side, they are world champions, but when you are down to 10 men, you can't carry on, the game is over. Perhaps we could have got back into the game at the start of the second half, we had two chances but of course once Thiago Motta went off injured, we didn't have anything left in the tank."

Gianluigi Buffon

"For many of our squad it was their first final so that's why it's a huge disappointment. But it's also true that in such an important match when there's the substantial difference that you saw, all you can do is applaud the others.

"I had a great view of the red waves from the first minute to the last. They played with great knowledge of being strong and knowing how to achieve this type of result."

The history boys

Spain: 2012 European Championship winners, player by player

Team spirit...every player worked hard for each other

Iker CASILLAS

Spain's record cap-holder and now captain of three international title-winning sides. Lived up to his nickname of "Saint Iker" with crucial saves against Croatia's Ivan Rakitic in the group stage and against Italy's Antonio Di Natale in the Final.

Alvaro ARBELOA

Real Madrid full-back who played every minute of Spain's six games in this summer's tournament.

Gerard PIQUE

Barcelona centre-back who was ever-present during the tournament and whose partnership with Real Madrid's Ramos provided the foundation for Spain's success.

Sergio RAMOS

Played right-back at Euro 2008 and the 2010 World Cup but is now Spain's natural first-choice at centre-back, where he played every minute of the six games at Euro 2012. Scored in the semi-final penalty shoot-out against Portugal with a Panenka-style chip.

Jordi ALBA

Marauding left-back who was one of the players of the tournament, scoring a wonderful goal in the Final, expertly finishing Xavi's through pass after a long run from deep. Agreed to join Barcelona from La Liga rivals Valencia after the tournament finished.

Xabi ALONSO

Midfield lynchpin who started every game at Euro 2012 and was the star of the quarter-final against France, scoring both goals in the 2-0 victory in Donetsk on his 100th appearance for the side.

Sergio BUSQUETS

Defensive midfielder who has grown in stature over the past two seasons. Excelled during extra-time in the semi-final against Portugal. Another ever-present in all six games.

XAVI

Midfield metronome who starred in the Final after struggling to find his rhythm en route to Kiev, possibly as a result of tiredness after a long season. Started every game but was substituted by Pedro with three minutes remaining of normal time in the semi-final against Portugal. At 32, he says he will carry on and play for Spain in Brazil in 2014, explaining: "If I feel good I will speak with the coach. If I can, then I shall be there."

Important...Fabregas both created and scored goals

Captain...Casillas

Outstanding...Iniesta

Golden Boot...Torres

Cesc FABREGAS

A brilliant performance in the Final, setting up Silva for Spain's opening goal. Alternated with Torres and Negredo in the number nine position, starting three matches and appearing as a substitute in the other three. While Torres and Negredo played as more conventional forwards, Fabregas played in the withdrawn "false nine" role. Scored in the opening group game against Italy after they had taken the lead.

Andres INIESTA

Spain's outstanding player of the tournament. From the opening game, when he was Spain's most dangerous attacker against Italy, to the Final, when his pass set up Fabregas to cross for Silva to head Spain's opening goal. At one point in the competition he started to look tired after a long season with Barcelona, but he appeared to find a new lease of life in the Final.

David SILVA

The Manchester City attacker started every game but was subbed in five of the six matches as Del Bosque tweaked his formation. Scored in the 4-0 thrashing of Republic of Ireland and with a stunning header in the Final.

Fernando TORRES

The Chelsea forward endured a torrid first game, when he had to watch from the bench as Fabregas scored against Italy, and then missed two chances of his own when he did appear as a substitute. But he found his scoring touch against the Irish, in a game that he started. His goal in the Final meant he finished on three goals, making him the tournament's joint top scorer, but he claimed the Golden Boot outright with more assists and less time played than his rivals.

Alvaro NEGREDO

Centre-forward who started the semi-final against Portugal but who was replaced after 54 minutes because Spain's unusual strategy of playing long balls to him had not produced anything worthwhile.

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Jesus NAVAS
Winger who gave Spain a boost when he appeared as a sub against Italy and Croatia, where he scored a late winner, walking the ball in from Iniesta's pass.

PEDRO
The Barcelona forward had played his way into the squad ahead of Iker Muniain and Roberto Soldado and saw some action as a sub in the knockout stages.

Juan MATA
The Chelsea midfielder scored with his first touch in the Final – his one and only appearance in the competition. Along with Torres he joined an elite band of players who have won the Champions League and European Championship in the same season.

Javi MARTINEZ
The Athletic Bilbao defensive midfielder replaced Alonso in the second half against the Republic of Ireland, his only appearance of the tournament.

Santi CAZORLA
The Malaga winger made two late substitute appearances during the tournament, against Ireland and France.

UNUSED

Victor VALDES
Barcelona goalkeeper, third-choice.

Pepe REINA
Liverpool keeper, second-choice.

Raul ALBIOL
Reserve centre-back called up as cover after Barcelona's Carles Puyol was ruled out through injury.

JUANFRAN
Reserve right-back called into the squad after Andoni Iraola was injured in the Spanish Cup Final.

THE COACH
Vicente DEL BOSQUE
The 61-year-old won 18 caps as a player for his country and appeared at Euro 80 – when Spain did not win a game. Ironically, Del Bosque was sacked by Real Madrid president Florentino Perez despite winning the Champions League, allegedly because he did not suit Madrid's galactico image. Del Bosque has now become the first coach to win the World Cup, European Championship and Champions League.

A-Z of Euro 2012

A is for Adidas, whose Tango 12 official match ball was a vast improvement on the 2010 World Cup Jabulani and a major factor in so many good crosses being converted for headed goals.

B is for Beards, from Olof Mellberg and Daniele De Rossi to the Czech players who refused to shave until they were knocked out of the competition.

Hairy...Mellberg

C is for Countdown to kick-off, the worst example of football's "Disneyfication". Note to UEFA: it's a football match, not WWF wrestling.

D is for the Deal, or rather no deal that Italians suspected Spain and Croatia might strike to knock them out of the competition. In the end, Italian paranoia proved unfounded.

E is for Empty seats, especially in Ukraine, where supporters couldn't afford to travel and locals couldn't pay the high ticket prices.

F is for False Nine, the bold tactical formation from Spain coach Vicente Del Bosque.

G is for Gdansk, stunning stadium and the tournament's most over-used headline: "Murder on Gdansk Floor".

H is for Headers, 22 in 31 games, four more than the previous record of 17 in 2004.

I is for Istvan Vad, the Hungarian goal-line official who was sent home after missing Ukraine's "phantom goal" against England.

J is for Jesus Navas, the substitute who saved Spain's tournament when he scored the late winner against Croatia in the final moments of the last group game.

K is for Krakow, the Polish city that missed out on hosting matches but played host to Italy, Holland and England's training bases.

L is for Low tolerance of cheating and feigning of injury. Players who went down injured were quickly escorted from the pitch, keeping disruption to a minimum.

M is for Mario. Balotelli, Mandzukic and Gomez – it was the Christian name of choice for the tournament's most prolific marksmen.

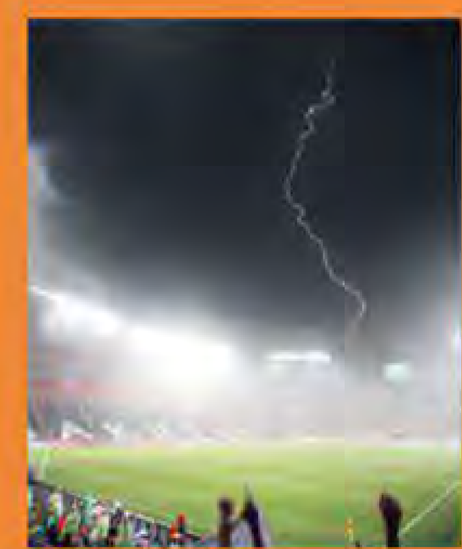
N is for El Nino, Fernando Torres, winner of the tournament Golden Boot as top scorer with three goals (and more assists with less playing time than his rivals).

O is for Overnight train journeys. For fans on budgets and with flights at a premium, 15-hour journeys were not uncommon between venues.

P is for Andrea Pirlo, overrun by Spain in the Final but the single outstanding player for Italy in their other six matches.

Gone...Holland's Bert Van Marwijk

Q is for Quitting. The coaches of Holland, France, Russia, Poland and Croatia all announced their departures in the wake of disappointing results and performances.


Strike...lightning in Donetsk

R is for Rain, lots of it, in Poland and down in Donetsk, where a thunderstorm almost forced the postponement of France-Ukraine.

S is for Stadiums of Hate, the BBC Panorama documentary in which former England defender Sol Campbell predicted fans would come home from Ukraine in coffins.

T is for two tournaments. Euro 2012 was never a whole experience: there were two currencies, two time zones, even two sized railway gauges.

U is for UEFA fines: €20,000 for racist chanting, €100,000 for showing your pants when celebrating a goal.

V is for Vicente Del Bosque, Spain's coach, the second man to win the World Cup and Euros as coach, after West Germany's Helmut Schoen.

W is for WAGS. Where were they? England's wives and girlfriends kept a low profile as the players and staff went on a charm offensive in Krakow.

X is for Xavi, who had a quiet tournament...until the Final, when he created Spain's first three goals.

Y is for yellow cards. The booking suffered by Greece's Giorgos Karagounis against Russia was one of the few refereeing mistakes.

Z is for Zero goalless draws in the knockout stages, a tournament first.

Euro 2012 all-star XI

Gavin Hamilton picks his team of the tournament

GOALKEEPER

IKER CASILLAS (SPAIN)

Spain's captain tends to get overlooked in the rush to praise his team's outfield players but the 31-year-old lifted his third international trophy after playing an invaluable role with crucial saves – in particular against Croatia's Ivan Rakitic and Italy's Antonio Di Natale, and a penalty stop against Portugal's Joao Moutinho.
Honourable mentions: **Gianluigi Buffon**, outstanding for Italy in the penalty shoot-out against England and led by example as captain, belting out the national anthem before every game. Portugal's **Rui Patricio** repaid the faith shown in him by Paulo Bento, his former club coach. **Przemyslaw Tyton** came to Poland's rescue when his captain Wojciech Szczesny was sent off in the opening game.

RIGHT-BACK

JOAO PEREIRA (PORTUGAL)

The Sporting Lisbon man continued Portugal's fine tradition of right-backs. Tenacious and adventurous, he outshone his rivals.
Honourable mentions: Czech Republic's **Theodor Gebre Selassie**, who was the source of many of his country's best attacks. **Glen Johnson** excelled for an England team with limited ambitions.

Attack-minded...Gebre Selassie

Commanding...Ramos

CENTRE-BACKS

SERGIO RAMOS (SPAIN)
GERARD PIQUE (SPAIN)

This centre-back pairing conceded one goal in the entire tournament, in their first group match against Italy.
Honourable mentions: Portugal's **Pepe**, who resorted to fewer of the dark arts while representing his country than in the white of Real Madrid. **Mats Hummels** was outstanding for Germany in the group stages, but was exposed by Italy's forward line. **Joleon Lescott** rose to the challenge for England, while **Bruno Alves** also impressed for Portugal despite his semi-final penalty miss.

LEFT -BACK

JORDI ALBA (SPAIN)

One of the few additions to Spain's first team since the 2010 World Cup. Scored an exceptional goal in the Final in a move which confirmed why Barcelona were so keen to sign him this summer.
Honourable mentions: **Philipp Lahm** of Germany, who was a goalscoring threat on the left flank, and **Fabio Coentrao** who played a key role in Portugal's counter-attacking formation.

CENTRAL MIDFIELD

ANDREA PIRLO (ITALY)
SAMI KHEDIRA (GERMANY)

Pirlo was outstanding for Italy in a deep-lying role which England players found impossible to deal with. Against Germany in the semi-final, his creative play helped seal a memorable victory. Khedira excelled as a dynamic figure in the early stages for Germany and scored a memorable goal against Greece in the quarter-final.
Honourable mentions: **Joao Moutinho**, who showed there was more to Portugal than Cristiano Ronaldo, **Steven Gerrard**, who led by example as England captain, and **Daniele De Rossi**, who demonstrated his versatility in Italy's changing formations.

RIGHT ATTACK

CRISTIANO RONALDO (PORTUGAL)

After a blistering season for Real Madrid, Portugal's captain took time to find his feet at the tournament but his individual performances against Holland and Czech Republic took his country to the brink of the Final.
Honourable mentions: **Alan Dzagoev**, a bright new star, despite Russia's

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TEAM OF THE TOURNAMENT

Brilliant...Ozil

premature exit. **Marco Reus** gave Germany an exciting option when he started the quarter-final against Greece.

PLAYMAKER

XAVI (SPAIN)

Relatively quiet in Spain's early games, he was even substituted in the semi-final against Portugal. But he rose to the occasion against Italy in the Final, providing a series of beautiful assists for Spain's goals.
Honourable mentions: **Mesut Ozil**, brilliant in spurts for Germany, **Riccardo Montolivo**, who provided an additional creative outlet for Italy, and **Luka Modric**, who excelled for a Croatia team that pushed Spain and Italy all the way in a tight group.

LEFT ATTACK

ANDRES INIESTA (SPAIN)

The player of the tournament and the man Spain looked to for inspiration in their "striker-less" formation.
Honourable mentions: **Petr Jiracek**, who emerged as a star of the Czech Republic side that surprisingly reached the quarter-finals.

CENTRE-FORWARD

MARIO BALOTELLI (ITALY)

An explosive performance against Germany carried Italy into the Final and confirmed that Balotelli's talent had been expertly handled by Italian coach Cesare Prandelli.
Honourable mentions: **Robert Lewandowski**, whose powerful header kick-started Poland's campaign. Croatia's **Mario Mandzukic**, who joined Bayern Munich during the tournament. Italy's **Antonio Cassano**, who excelled after a traumatic season. **WS**

Deep-lying...Pirlo was outstanding

And then there was one...

Team by team, the 16 finalists in Poland and Ukraine in the order they left the tournament

GROUP-STAGE EXIT

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Went into the tournament on a huge wave of domestic optimism, buoyed by a 14-match unbeaten run. However, the lack of quality players told and Giovanni Trapattoni's tactics and substitutions came under fire. Fans travelled in their thousands but were criticised by Roy Keane for singing when they were losing, especially "You'll never beat the Irish". Croatia, Spain and Italy all did.
Hit Keith Andrews
Misses Shay Given, John O'Shea

SWEDEN

Coach Erik Hamren put a brave face on Sweden's performances, which saw them out of the tournament after defeats to Ukraine and England. Thousands of fans, one of the tournament's most impressive sights, left early. Hamren had tried to play a more expansive game but was let down by a lack of quality in defence.
Hit Zlatan Ibrahimovic
Miss Andreas Granqvist

POLAND

The co-hosts had their moments during matches but were unable to sustain their form for the full 90 minutes. Wojciech Szczesny struggled with the pressure of being captain, but the Poles found a new hero in Przemyslaw Tyton. Coach Franciczek Smuda was criticised for fielding Sebastian Boenisch, who was not fully fit, while Ludovic Obraniak failed to live up to expectations as playmaker and Robert Lewandowski was left isolated in attack. Smuda quit saying he wouldn't change a thing, but his departure may not be enough to appease the critics, with calls for FA boss Grzegorz Lato to go.
Hits Robert Lewandowski, Przemyslaw Tyton, Jakub Blaszczykowski
Misses Sebastian Boenisch, Ludovic Obraniak, Wojciech Szczesny

RUSSIA

Began so well with the opening victory over the Czech Republic but things deteriorated rapidly. The Russian FA faced a torrent of criticism after a disastrous campaign on and off the pitch. One newspaper compared the ageing squad to the "Buranovskiye Babushki" – the singing grannies who represented Russia at this year's Eurovision Song Contest. Coach Dick Advocaat was always going to leave for PSV Eindhoven, but FA chief executive Sergey Fursenko was also forced out.
Hits Alan Dzagoev, Aleksandr Anyukov
Miss Andrei Arshavin

Kept on...Van Bommel

Good show...Ibrahimovic

DENMARK

A generally positive campaign, despite being in the "Group of Death", in which they were unlucky to lose to Portugal, after twice equalising, but were well beaten by Germany. Coach Morten Olsen stays for the 2014 World Cup qualifiers and his reign as the world's longest-serving manager is under no threat. There was general sympathy that UEFA overreacted with their fine of striker Nicklas Bendtner.
Hit Michael Krohn-Dehli
Misses none

HOLLAND

A disaster from start to their early exit. It was not a happy camp. Robin Van Persie failed to spark despite the unconditional support of coach Bert Van Marwijk, Arjen Robben was a particularly disruptive influence, while Klaas-Jan Huntelaar was upset at not being selected ahead of Van Persie. Van Marwijk's continued selection of son-in-law Mark Van Bommel as a starter in midfield attracted criticism, particularly when Nigel De Jong was subbed ahead of him against Denmark. Van Marwijk had recently signed a new contract extension that took him to 2016 but he was sacked by the Dutch FA after losing all three games. The federation has insisted that it would not consider a foreigner as national coach, with former bosses Louis Van Gaal and Frank Rijkaard candidates to return and help restore discipline and "traditional values".
Hits Nigel De Jong, Maarten Stekelenburg
Misses Arjen Robben, Mark Van Bommel, Robin Van Persie, John Heitinga, Gregory Van der Wiel

Opportunity...Poland keeper Tyton grabbed his chance when Poland's first-choice keeper was suspended

Unlucky...Modric

CROATIA

Can consider themselves unlucky to lose out from a very tight group and were aggrieved at being denied at least two possible penalties in the final game against Spain, when Ivan Rakitic was inches away from scoring the goal that would have taken them through at Spain's expense. Slaven Bilic left to take charge at Lokomotiv Moscow, but the problem with a persistent racist element of their fans remains.
Hits Luka Modric, Mario Mandzukic, Ivan Perisic
Miss Their fans

UKRAINE

The local media had feared that the co-hosts would be the whipping boys of their group, so the opening victory over Sweden was greeted with as much relief as jubilation. Can consider themselves unlucky that Marco Devych's "phantom goal" was ruled out against England. After that final group game, coach Oleg Blokhin's frustrations boiled over when he invited a local journalist "outside" to settle their differences.
Hits Andriy Shevchenko, Andriy Yarmolenko, Yaroslav Rakitskyi
Miss none

BEATEN QUARTER-FINALISTS

CZECH REPUBLIC

Became the first team in tournament history to win their group after losing their first match, but they did not have enough attacking ambition to get past Portugal n the quarter-final. Coach Michal Bilek coaxed a lot from his young, inexperienced side, who missed the injured Tomas Rosicky against Portugal.
Hits Petr Jiracek, Theodor Gebre Selassie, Tomas Hubschman, Vaclav Pilar
Misses Milan Baros, Tomas Rosicky

GREECE

Showed great spirit to exceed expectations with a series of impressive second-half recoveries, although federation president Sofoklis Pilavios got carried away with his assertion that "we've once again become titans and demi-gods". Swept away by Germany in the quarter-final in Warsaw.
Hits Dimitris Salpigidis, Giorgos Karagounis, Sotiris Ninis
Misses Kostas Chalkias, Michalis Sifakis

FRANCE

Signs that they had put the disaster of the 2010 World Cup behind them proved unfounded. Laurent Blanc's future was uncertain even before the tournament kicked off. His tactics against Spain were confusing and he stepped down shortly after that defeat. The players bickered among themselves and also became embroiled in a row over bonuses.
Hits Yohan Cabaye, Hugo Lloris
Misses Samir Nasri, Jeremy Menez, Hatem Ben Arfa, Franck Ribery

ENGLAND

A success by the limited expectations that for once accompanied them. There was far greater harmony in the camp than in South Africa and the FA also won friends for their open-house approach in Krakow. The players understood and implemented Roy Hodgson's safety-first approach, but traditional 4-4-2 tactics were only going to take England so far. Ultimately, Wayne Rooney's suspension and lack of match fitness cost them.
Hits Steven Gerrard, Joleon Lescott, Danny Welbeck, Glen Johnson, Scott Parker
Misses Wayne Rooney, Ashley Young

Traditional approach...Gerrard

SEMI-FINALISTS

PORTUGAL

Written off by many before the tournament as inferior to previous squads, despite the presence of Cristiano Ronaldo after a prolific season for Real Madrid. Coach Paulo Bento built a 4-3-3 system that incorporated Ronaldo's talent but also allowed others to flourish.
Hits Cristiano Ronaldo, Pepe, Joao Moutinho, Rui Patricio, Joao Pereira
Misses Helder Postiga, Hugo Almeida

GERMANY

In the group stages and against Greece in the quarter-final, Joachim Low's young side fully deserved their label of favourites, playing fast, attack-mined, technically proficient football for intense periods. But against Italy, Low's rotation tactics unravelled. Spain have now won more tournaments in the past four years as Germany have in the past 30. Danger of becoming semi-final chokers.
Hits Marco Reus, Sami Khedira, Mats Hummels, Mesut Ozil
Misses Bastian Schweinsteiger, Holger Badstuber

Struggled... Schweinsteiger

RUNNERS-UP

ITALY

Went into the tournament amid the backdrop of another domestic match-fixing scandal that saw first-choice defender Domenico Criscito arrested at the team's training camp. Bounced back from their horror show in South Africa and exceeded expectations by reaching the Final. Unlucky to come up against such a superlative Spain side. Coach Cesare Prandelli deserves much credit for pursuing flexible tactics and an attack-minded approach.
Hits Andrea Pirlo, Daniele De Rossi, Riccardo Montolivo, Leonardo Bonucci, Antonio Cassano, Mario Balotelli
Miss Giorgio Chiellini

WINNERS

SPAIN

Condemned as "boring" by those who struggled to understand the concept of the "false nine" formation. There was some truth in the argument that they used possession as a defensive measure, following Johan Cruyff's old adage that the opposition cannot score if they cannot get the ball. But everything changed in the Final, where Spain attacked with ruthless purpose and took the game to a new level.
Hits Andres Iniesta, Xavi, Iker Casillas, Jordi Alba, Sergio Ramos
Miss Alvaro Negredo

Ruthless...everything clicked for Spain against Italy in the Final

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Keir Radnedge

COMMENT

One of the best

The 14th European Championship will be remembered as a great tournament

Euro 2012 was a tournament to remember and may well come to be seen as a high point in the history of the European Championship.

Not for the organisation, however; that is a different issue.

The quality of the football itself was better than any of the four previous 16-team versions. Also, given that UEFA is to bring in "poorer" teams with its expansion to a field of 24, it was better than anything likely to be seen in the lets-grab-the-cash era to come.

Poor games? Can't think of one. No-hope performances? Can't think of one.

Certainly fans saw a number of games in which one side was outclassed – the Republic of Ireland being taken to the cleaners by Spain was one such match. But that was a game in which the credit was all to Spain.

Today's overstuffed 32-team World Cup is dependent on reaching the 16-team second round before it catches alight. How many group games from South Africa live on in the memory? But the vast majority of Euro 2012 sparkled for one reason or another.

Even sides such as Sweden and Greece, who might have been expected to play conservatively, happy just to be present, contributed to the fun and games. Sweden produced a spunky second half against England and then overturned France, while Greece discovered a talent for mid-match resurrection, as displayed against Poland in the opening game and then their surprising win against Russia and sudden, brief, spark against Germany.

Virtuoso...Ronaldo

The latter match prompted the quote of the tournament for many when Germany coach Joachim Low said: "Curious team, Greece. They create one chance but score two goals."

Every game was an occasion, holding centre stage in its own right, not a mere catalogue number.

Also, in an era when the team is king, it was as if the tournament had stepped back in time by providing a stage on which Cristiano Ronaldo rose above the generally high technical standards to a different individual plane. His virtuosity shone out, above all against Holland, in a manner which was quite "old fashioned", if it can be put like that.

Significantly, however, in the team ethic context, it was when all his

Thrilling contest...Germany's Mats Hummels puts Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon under pressure in the semi-finals

Portugal pals were too busy confronting Spain in midfield that they fell fatally short of being able to provide him with enough bullets to fire.

Ronaldo is not everybody's favourite as he displays an arrogant extravagance which contrasts starkly with the little-kid-having-fun persona of Lionel Messi. But his achievements this past season speak for themselves and it was something of a throwback to see an individual command a tournament in a manner beyond anyone since Michel Platini of France in 1984 and Holland's Marco Van Basten in 1988.

Flop...Holland and Van Persie were a big disappointment

Worthy champions

A credible tournament demands balance and Euro 2012 provided that in coming up with the "right" four semi-finalists. Spain, as reigning European and world champions, fast-improving Germany, recast Italy and consistently competitive Portugal all earned their right to be in at the death. Any one of them could have laid a claim to be worthy champions.

The major snag in terms of football results was the failure of the hosts, for a third successive major tournament, to progress beyond the group stage. Austria and Switzerland failed in 2008; South Africa failed in the 2010 World Cup; and Poland and Ukraine failed here.

Poland's failure was not a surprise as they were the lowest-ranked team coming in to the competition. But Ukraine were a disappointment, particularly viewing the opposition of a vulnerable England, a France team undermined by its own immaturity and a Sweden side short of the quality of previous eras.

"Curious team, Greece. They create one chance but score two goals"
Germany coach Joachim Low

The success and momentum of a tournament leans heavily on the euphoria stoked by the hosts. This is less important in a 16-team competition than in a 24- or 32-team event which needs more time for that extra knockout round. Can you imagine how 2016 in France will fall flat over the closing fortnight if *Les Bleus* were to blow up in the first round?

So, while FIFA and UEFA insist that football status is not a major theme in hosting awards, perhaps that should be re-evaluated. These are, after all, football tournaments, and the governing bodies have a responsibility to place the welfare of the game above all other factors – even money, essential as that is.

UEFA's decision to take the finals to Poland and Ukraine had been both a surprise and a gamble which caused no end of headaches.

Poland came through, but the Ukrainian half was in doubt right up until the finals draw in December 2011. Political complications – with European Union leaders boycotting matches in Ukraine due to human rights concerns – underlined the cross-issues care that sports authorities should also apply over the milieu into which they entrust their flagship events.

Taking the finals into two vast countries with inadequate transport infrastructures had other negative effects. Firstly it discouraged foreign fans from attending in the numbers previously seen at Euro finals and, secondly, it prevented fans who did attend from swapping and switching travel arrangements at short notice to follow the competition's ebb and flow.

The imbalance between the countries was marked on various levels. Poland and Ukraine have little in common apart from one shared border. They have different languages, different alphabets, different currencies, different time zones, even different railway gauges.

Also, Poland has been an independent nation state – whatever the complexities of the Soviet era – far longer than Ukraine. Thus Poland was better able to cope, administratively, with preparations; Ukraine was full of wild and murky tales about how

Support....with their team based in Kiev for all three games, Sweden fans were among the few who travelled in great numbers

contracts were awarded for the various infrastructural projects.

One, however, which stood out, was the magnificent Donbass Arena, home to Shakhtar Donetsk. Multi-millionaire Rinat Ahmetov funded that and much else around. This is a "real" football stadium and the nearest running track is across the road at the old Olympic Stadium. Do not be surprised if UEFA comes back some day soon with the Champions League Final.

The cultural, social and national differences of the two countries were revealed in contrasting local support for the finals.

Poles "lived" the tournament far more intensely than Ukrainians; they possess, after all, the western fan culture. Too many matches in Ukraine lacked atmosphere because they were short on visiting fans and long on neutrals and walk-up queues at the ticket desk on match days were a common feature in Donetsk.

Visiting fan absence – excepting the Swedes who flooded Kiev courtesy of the convenience of seeing all their team's three matches there – could not be blamed on the now-traditional (and boringly predictable) scare-story programme run by BBC TV's *Panorama*. The message that travelling fans would find themselves in a land overrun by violent racists was a proven lie and ex-England international Sol Campbell's media ambitions were not enhanced by his outrageous assertion that fans risked coming home "in a coffin".

Certainly, a steady string of crowd incidents drew disciplinary sanctions from UEFA but were not, in the main, caused by host fans and added up to no more than might have been evident wherever the finals had landed. The most contentious crowd violence was prompted by the unhappy coincidence not only of Poland and Russia being drawn in the same group but of their specific match falling on Russian Independence Day.

Old fashioned

Back on the pitch, the trend towards one striker supported by a line of three continued to evolve. England's reliance on 4-4-2 looked positively old fashioned, though new manager Roy Hodgson cannot be criticised for coming up with a highly effective short-term solution to a tough challenge. The measure by which he succeeded is evident from England's quarter-final attainment.

Hodgson proved a breath of fresh air for an English media which had long forgotten what it was like to hear a manager string together more than a handful of coherent words.

He was unfailingly courteous but firm in dismissing attempts to drag out the Rio Ferdinand omission issue, and was impressively sure-footed in his verbal diplomacy towards opponents and host nations. Above all, he was prepared to talk football. He won over many critics of his appointment and raised questions about why he was not entrusted with the job long ago. Hodgson, after all, is not exactly a new kid on the block.

The message that travelling fans would find themselves in a land overrun by violent racists was a lie and Sol Campbell's media ambitions were not enhanced by his outrageous assertion that fans risked coming home in a coffin

No controversies this time about the ball, which behaved impeccably. Whatever mistakes goalkeepers made – not too many either – were never attributed to some strange "wobble" in the air. A mark of the ball's consistency were the gasps of astonishment when Karim Benzema of France twice blazed shots wildly over the bar against Spain.

Howard Webb of England and Italy's Nicola Rizzoli were the pick of the referees, while Turkey's Cuneyt Cakir came through his Portugal-Spain test admirably in the face of media-fuelled tensions back in Lisbon and Porto.

Of course, Hungary's luckless Victor Kassai was let down badly by goal-line assistant Istvan Vad in refusing Marko Devych a "behind the line" goal in the Ukraine-England game. Never mind that an offside should have been spotted moments earlier in the move.

Assertions by UEFA president Michel Platini and obedient refereeing boss Pierluigi Collina that this was just a one-in-a-thousand accident were vapid. The entire point of improving match control is that no major tournament match should be at the mercy of refereeing incompetence when it comes to matters of fact.

For all the presence of the goal-line assistants, the usual amount of arm-tugging and obstruction went unpunished in the penalty boxes of Euro 2012. Platini's suggestion that the assistants' presence contributed towards the surprisingly high percentage of headed goals was clutching at straws – or should that be shirts?

Benzema and Holland's Robin Van Persie were among the individual flops of the tournament, though responsibility must be cast partly in the direction of coaches who thought they knew better than the players' own club managers.

Holland's Bert Van Marwijk duly paid with his job for a 100 per cent record of defeats. Sad to say there were few regrets at his side's first-round departure. That was a direct legacy of the still-fresh memories of the manner in which they sullied the World Cup Final two years ago. Time for a little honest self-analysis, though the Dutch may insist that they know best.

As the 2011-12 season finally drew to a close it was clear that the decisive stage of the Champions League remains a quality quotient above Euro 2012 but that the European Championship has established itself as far superior to the World Cup.

At least in its 16-team format. WS

Enthusiastic...more than 100,000 fans crammed into the Fan Zone in Warsaw to watch Poland's opening match

OLYMPICS 2012 PREVIEW

PREVIEW GROUP A

Pearce set to make history

Britain has a team in an Olympic football tournament for the first time in 52 years

GREAT BRITAIN

Despite the Football Associations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales objecting to a Great Britain football team for fear of losing their individual status at future FIFA tournaments, GB manager Stuart Pearce was set to select a cosmopolitan squad made up from all four corners of the United Kingdom.

However, just how many players outside of England and Wales will make his starting line-up is open to question.

Pearce sprung a major surprise a month before the games began when he left former England captain David Beckham out of his final 18-man squad.

Beckham had been involved with the London 2012 programme from when they won the initial bid in Singapore in 2005 right up to receiving the Olympic flame in Athens in May this year. It was expected that he would be a nailed-on certainty for Team GB, but Pearce, who flew to Los Angeles to watch him play for his club, clearly wasn't impressed.

Much credit must go to the GB coach for not bowing to popular opinion. Pearce clearly means business.

With Beckham left out of the squad, attention will now turn to 18 players rather than one individual. The Welsh duo of Gareth Bale and Aaron Ramsey, who both fit the selection criteria, could just be the jewels in the British crown ahead of any Englishman Pearce selects.

If they can win their group then a potential semi-final against Brazil in Manchester is a mouth-watering possibility. Team GB could get a medal, but it may not be gold.

THE COACH

As the man in charge of England under-21s, it looked at one point as though **Stuart Pearce** would have three jobs this summer, having already been appointed Team GB boss and caretaker England manager following the sacking of Fabio Capello. He becomes the first manager of a British Olympic football team since Norman Creek in 1960.

In contention...potential squad members Frazier Campbell of Sunderland (left) and Everton's Jack Rodwell model the Team GB kit

In charge...Pearce will be keen to win

KEY PLAYERS

On the eve of his 21st season at Manchester United, Welshman **Ryan Giggs** will be keen to be part of the set-up and is ready to perform on the global stage for the first time in his illustrious career.

Having been on the fringes of Roy Hodgson's Euro 2012 squad, the 22-year-old Chelsea striker **Daniel Sturridge** should be a regular starter in Pearce's team.

The blistering pace of **Gareth Bale** should get fans off their seats at Old Trafford, Wembley and in his home country's Millennium Stadium for Team GB's group matches. Should be a shoo-in for selection.

Overlooked by Hodgson for Euro 2012 and not rated by previous full-time England boss Fabio Capello, **Micah Richards** will have a point to prove.

Duncan Bond

Pace...Bale should be playing in Wales

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Russians leave in disgrace

Advocaat's men and Poles go out as Czech Republic and Greece spring surprises

Group A provided the biggest shock of the group stage, with the Czech Republic and Greece progressing to the quarter-finals at the expense of much-fancied Russia and tournament co-hosts Poland.

Russia's Dutch coach Dick Advocaat had hoped to repeat the experience of his compatriot Guus Hiddink, who steered the Russians to the semi-finals in 2008. Advocaat fielded much the same team, but with a potential new star in Alan Dzagoev, the 21-year-old from CSKA Moscow who scored against Czech Republic and Poland but failed to shine when his side underestimated Greece in their final game.

A campaign that had begun so well on the pitch ended in ignominy for Russia, with Advocaat departing for PSV Eindhoven and calls for a new generation of players to be given a chance. Russia's exit was compounded by the behaviour of their fans, who were punished by UEFA for a series of misdemeanours inside stadiums and for rioting on the streets of Warsaw.

Violence...Russia and Poland supporters clash on the streets of Warsaw before the teams' group game

Over and out...Russia's players are disconsolate

> **"After the first game many fans lost faith in us, which only doubles our joy now. We deserved to qualify for our team spirit. We worked hard"**
> **Czech Republic coach Michal Bilek**

Poland showed glimpses of brilliance, notably from Robert Lewandowski and captain Jakub Blaszczykowski, but could not sustain that form for the full 90 minutes in any of their three games and coach Franciszek Smuda's contract was not renewed.

In contrast, Greece were able to summon up reserves of resilience after suffering several setbacks. Unlucky to be down to 10 men against Poland, half-time substitute Dimitris Salpigidis sparked a recovery which pooped the Poles' opening party. Depleted by injuries and suspensions they then lost to the Czechs, but capitalised on Russia's defensive errors in their final match, holding out with a rearguard effort invoking the spirit of 2004.

And so the Czech Republic, despite being comprehensively beaten by Russia in their opening game, won the group.

The introduction of Tomas Hubschman gave them more solidity in midfield in their second game against Greece. Though without injured captain Tomas Rosicky for the final game against Poland, they withstood initial pressure to claim an unlikely top spot.

Gavin Hamilton

JUNE 8 – WARSAW

POLAND 1
GREECE 1
HT: 1-0. Att: 56,070. Ref: Velasco Carballo (Spa)

Salpigidis spoils the party

After an opening ceremony heavily laced with references to Warsaw's most famous son, the composer and pianist Frederic Chopin, it was left to Poland to orchestrate an opening victory for the fans who packed the National Stadium in eager anticipation. But the hosts failed to hit the high notes despite taking the lead against a Greece team depleted by injuries and an unfortunate red card.

Opening matches are, by tradition, cautious affairs, but this game had everything: goals, red cards, a missed penalty, refereeing blunders and a heightened sense of excitement that the tournament was finally under way.

Poland had the early chances, with Lukasz Piszczek proving highly effective down the right flank. And after 17 minutes his Borussia Dortmund team-mates combined for Poland's goal, Jakub Blaszczykowski supplying a deep cross for Robert Lewandowski to power a header past Greece keeper Kostas Chalkias.

Greece had looked capable of playing a more expansive game than in previous tournaments but they were forced to change tack by a series of unfortunate

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CZECH REPUBLIC	3	2	0	1	4	5	6
GREECE	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
RUSSIA	3	1	1	1	5	3	4
POLAND	3	0	2	1	2	3	2

Penalty...Szczesny (left) trips Salpigidis

events. Avraam Papadopoulos was forced off with a knee injury and, just before half-time, Sokratis Papastathopoulos was sent-off in highly questionable circumstances by Spanish referee Carlos Velasco Carballo. After being booked early on for a strong aerial challenge on Lewandowski, Papastathopoulos was given a second yellow card after tangling with Rafal Murawski. It was barely a foul, let alone a booking, but Greece were down to 10 men.

Coach Fernando Santos responded by replacing Sotiris Ninis with Dimitris Salpigidis at half-time – a substitution that turned the game. Six minutes into the second half, goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny challenged Fanis Gekas and his team-mate Marcin Wasilewski for a near-post Vasilis Torosidis cross, the ball bounced off Wasilewski and fell to Salpigidis, who steered home.

Worse was to come for Szczesny. When Salpigidis sprung Poland's offside trap, he was tripped by the keeper, who was rightly sent off. Remarkably, substitute keeper Przemyslaw Tyton saved Kostas Katsouranis' penalty with his first touch.

Gavin Hamilton

JUNE 8 – WROCLAW

RUSSIA 4
CZECH REPUBLIC 1
HT: 2-0 Att: 40,803. Ref: Webb (Eng)

Dzagoev leads Russian dance

In stark contrast to a number of their supporters, Russia's footballers did their country proud in this all-eastern European encounter, outplaying, outsmarting and outclassing the lacklustre Czechs in virtually every category.

Russia's impudent invention, slick passing and counter-attacking flair had the Czech defence at sixes and sevens, and if Aleksandr Kerzhakov had not been so wasteful in front of goal the final scoreline would have been even wider.

It was, however, the Czechs who started the brighter. Midfielder Petr Jiracek was his usual all-action self, while right-back Theodor Gebre Selassie showed plenty of enterprise. But with lone front-man Milan Baros and playmaker Tomas Rosicky clearly struggling, Michal Bilek's side offered little penetration. And when Russia finally awoke after 15 minutes, they immediately made it count, Alan Dzagoev firing in after Kerzhakov's header had come back off a post.

A couple of minutes later, Dzagoev shot hurriedly wide with the goal at his mercy. But such was Russia's dominance that another goal simply had to come, and on 24 minutes Andrei Arshavin put the elegant Roman Shirokov through to finish with a delicate dink over Petr Cech.

Early in the second half Russia negligently handed the initiative back to the Czechs, who promptly reduced the arrears. Winger Vaclav Pilar latched on to an incisive Jaroslav Plasil pass before adroitly rounding goalkeeper Vyacheslav Malafeev and slipping the ball home.

It would not take long, though, for Russia to reassert their supremacy. After

Double...Dzagoev celebrates his second goal

missing a clutch of reasonable chances, Kerzhakov was replaced 17 minutes from time by Roman Pavlyuchenko and within seconds the latter flared into decisive action, first providing the assist for Dzagoev to score, then scoring a fine individual effort with a soft-shoe shuffle past Roman Hubnik and fierce drive beyond Cech.

Nick Bidwell

JUNE 12 – WROCLAW

GREECE 1
CZECH REPUBLIC 2
HT: 0-2. Att: 41,105. Ref: Lannoy (Fra)

Czechs back in the mix

So poor in their opening match, the Czechs bounced back into contention with a vital win over a disappointing Greece side undermined by conservatism and sheer bad luck. Without first-choice centre-backs

"We have one of the oldest teams in the competition, and some of the younger players didn't get a proper chance to play"
Russia federation president Sergey Fursenko, who quit after the tournament

Avraam Papadopoulos and Sokratis Papastathopoulos, coach Fernando Santos had to reconfigure the heart of his back four with Kostas Katsouranis and Kyriakos Papadopoulos.

The Czechs, quicker to the ball and keen to unleash runners from deep, were on a mission from the very outset and within six minutes were two goals up – both an object lesson in how to unhinge a square defence. First Petr Jiracek fired in after being sprung by Tomas Hubschman's clever through-ball, then Tomas Rosicky laid a marvellous pass inside the full-back to Theodor Gebre Selassie, whose low cross was bundled home by the knee of Vaclav Pilar.

The Greek camp were given further reason to believe the sporting gods had deserted them when, midway through the first-half, goalkeeper Kostas Chalkias hobbled off with a knee injury to be replaced by Michalis Sifakis.

Fate alone was not Greece's undoing. Throughout the first period, they were as lethargic as they were sloppy, and it says it all that before the break they carved out just one opening, Giorgos Fotakis rising to head in a Vasilis Torosidis free-kick. Just one problem – the assistant referee had flagged for offside, a borderline call if ever there was one.

The second half would prove a far different story. The Achilles tendon injury which forced Rosicky to remain in the dressing room at the break changed the dynamics of the game and, just as they had done against Poland, Santos' side belatedly found some fire in their bellies.

Eight minutes after the interval, a long, hopeful ball should have been meat and drink for Czech keeper Peter Cech but, perhaps distracted by the nearby presence of team-mate Tomas Sivok, Chelsea's Champions League hero failed to gather and substitute Fanis Gekas stole in to finish.

Suddenly the momentum had changed and if Greece had not overused the route-one approach they might even have restored parity. However, the anxious Czechs hung on, putting themselves right back in the qualification mix.

Nick Bidwell

No way through...Greece's Giorgos Karagounis is outnumbered by Czechs

On top...Poland defender Marcin Wasilewski clears a Russia corner

JUNE 12 – WARSAW

POLAND 1
RUSSIA 1
HT: 0-1. Att: 55,920. Ref: Stark (Ger)

Bitter rivals scrap to a draw

A score draw was the fairest outcome in this clash of former Communist rivals. It was also the result for which the Polish authorities could be grateful after the build-up to the match had been marred by violence between rival groups of Russia and Poland supporters.

Warsaw police made 183 arrests after clashes during a march by Russian fans from the city centre to the National Stadium to commemorate "Russia Day", the country's national holiday.

The heavy presence of Warsaw riot police helped to calm tensions by kick-off, but a fearsome rendition of the national anthems, during which Russian fans unveiled a giant banner, with the provocative slogan "This is Russia", served as a reminder of the bitter rivalry between the two nations.

Roared on by a partisan crowd, Poland had the early chances. Sebastian Boenich's header was denied by the legs of Russia's goalkeeper Vyacheslav Malafeev, Robert Lewandowski flashed a volley just over the bar, while Eugen Polanski's cleverly worked goal was chalked off for offside.

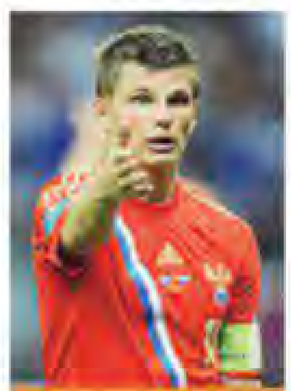
That ruling knocked Poland's confidence and Russia took the lead shortly afterwards. Although boasting fluid movement through a front three of Andrei Arshavin, Alan Dzagoev and Aleksandr Kerzhakov, Russia's goal came from a set-piece. Dzagoev, running from outside the area and evading his marker Lukacz Piszczek, headed Arshavin's free-kick past keeper Przemyslaw Tyton.

Dzagoev's goal threatened to end the hosts' involvement in the tournament, but they responded brightly in the second half. Lewandowski's aggressive run took him into the area but his crucial last touch took him wide of Malafeev and out of range.

Russia were struggling to find the breakthrough that would kill off the game, and when an attack from Arshavin petered out, Poland broke quickly. Piszczek fed Jakub Blaszczykowski, whose first touch took him between two defenders on the edge of the area. His second touch was a thunderous shot which flew past Malafeev.

Poland held out for a draw. It was two points dropped for Russia, but Warsaw's riot police could breathe a sigh of relief.

Gavin Hamilton



"If you have had high expectations for our team here, then it's your problem, not ours"
Andrei Arshavin blames Russia's fans for their disappointing exit from the competition

JUNE 16 – WARSAW

GREECE 1
RUSSIA 0
HT: 1-0. Att: 55,614. Ref: Eriksson (Swe)

Karagounis hero and villain

Giorgos Karagounis, one of Greece's victors in Euro 2004, was both hero and villain as they overturned the odds to claim an unlikely spot in the quarter-finals. Making his 120th international appearance, the 35-year-old scored the winning goal on the stroke of half-time but was then denied a clear penalty, with an adjudged dive earning a yellow card that kept him out of the quarter-finals.

Technically superior, Russia had the early chances. Andrei Arshavin poked Alan Dzagoev's cross straight at Michalis Sifakis, while Aleksandr Kerzhakov flashed a volley just wide. Yuri Zhirkov enjoyed a powerful run into the Greece area but could not find a team-mate.

But as Russian thoughts were turning to how they could break the deadlock in the second half, Greece took the lead. A hopeful long throw was misdirected by Sergei Ignashevich into the path of Karagounis, who scampered past Zhirkov and fired Greece ahead.

Greece dropped back and defended their lead in the second half but still could have doubled the advantage. First, Karagounis fell in the area after tangling with Ignashevich but collected only a booking for diving. Then, Giorgos Tzavellas curled a beautiful free-kick against the angle of post and crossbar.

Dzagoev went closest late on, glancing Arshavin's cross wide but Russia could not salvage anything from a game they had taken too lightly from the outset.

Gavin Hamilton

Through...Greece celebrate victory over Russia and a place in the last eight

JUNE 16 – WROCLAW

POLAND 0
CZECH REPUBLIC 1
HT: 0-0. Att: 41,480. Ref: Thomson (Sco)

Poles wilt in the storm

Appropriately on a night of torrential rain, thunder and lightning in Wroclaw, Poland's dream of making the knockout phase was first drenched, then fried, with the hosts undone by the resilience and spirit of a Czech side who needed only a draw but ended up winning the group.

Knowing that nothing less than victory would do and roared on by their vociferous fans, Poland were never going to play a reactive game. And while the Czechs did fashion an early chance when winger Vaclav Pilar completely missed his kick 12 yards from goal following good work by overlapping full-back Theodor Gebre Selassie, it was Poland who showed the greater attacking intent.

Dariusz Dudka sent an overhead kick into the side netting from close quarters; Ludovic Obraniak curled a left-footed free-kick inches off target; Petr Cech had to come smartly off his line to face down Jakub Blaszczykowski; and, in the best of all their initial opportunities, Robert Lewandowski sliced a shot wide when it seemed easier to score.

The Czechs, missing injured skipper Tomas Rosicky, were in real danger of going under. With Blaszczykowski his usual hyperactive self, Sebastian Boenisch had a volley pushed around the post by Cech, while Eugen Polanski headed straight at the keeper from a corner.

For the first 25 minutes there was only one team on the pitch, but inevitably the hosts could not maintain that turbo-charged pace and as the half went on, Michal Bilek's team grew in assurance and enterprise, Jaroslav Plasil going close with a deflected shot, then Pilar forcing a save from Przemyslaw Tyton.

But after the restart the tables seemed to have turned. While Poland looked ragged, nervy and too inclined to commit unnecessary fouls, their guests were suddenly clicking, with left-back David Limbersky particularly impressive.

The Czechs began to tighten the screw. Tyton had to act smartly to stop and clear a point-blank Tomas Sivok header from a Plasil free-kick, while Milan Baros would have been wiser to pass to a better placed team-mate than go for the death-or-glory long-range shot which Tyton dealt with.

Eighteen minutes from time the Czechs finally broke through. Rafal Murawski sloppily coughed up the ball deep in the opposition half and in a flash the counter-attack was on, Baros playing in Petr Jiracek, who jinked inside the floundering Marcin Wasilewski before poking home.

Poland huffed and puffed but their efforts were too frenzied by far and in the fourth minute of injury-time came the confirmation that it was never meant to be their night. Blaszczykowski's audacious lob over the onrushing Cech looked good for the equaliser until Michal Kadlec appeared from nowhere to head off the line.

Cue Polish heartbreak. But hats off to the Czechs, who had gone from no-hopers to top of Group A.

Nick Bidwell

"This is 100 per cent the end of the road. My contract runs out at the end of Euro 2012. Thanks guys"
Franciszek Smuda quits as Poland coach after the game against Czech Republic

Under pressure...Poland's Dudka (right) clears a Czech attack

GROUP A FACT FILE

- Dimitris Salpigidis became the first player to score for Greece in both the Euros and the World Cup.
- Wojciech Szczesny was suspended for Poland's second game after his red card against Greece. He then lost his place to Przemyslaw Tyton for the final group match.
- The Russian FA was fined €120,000 after fans attacked match stewards in their opening game against Czech Republic. They were also fined €30,000 after fans unfurled an illegal banner with the slogan "This Is Russia" during the anthems before the Poland game, and €35,000 after fans set off fireworks and displayed illicit banners against Greece.

Making a statement...Russian fans' banner

- Petr Jiracek's goal for Czech Republic after two minutes and 14 seconds against Greece was the joint-third fastest goal in the history of the tournament.
- Greece defender Avraam Papadopoulos tore cruciate ligaments in his left knee in the opening match against Poland and will be out of action until next year.
- This wasn't the first time the Czechs had qualified through the group stage with a negative goal difference. At Euro 96 they also progressed to the quarter-finals despite conceding more goals than they scored.

GROUP A MATCH DETAILS

POLAND 1 — GREECE 1

Scorer: Lewandowski 17
Team: Szczesny – Piszczek, Wasilewski, Perquis, Boenisch – Murawski, Polanski – Blaszczykowski, Obraniak, Rybus (Tyton ▶70) – Lewandowski
Sent off: Szczesny ■ 69

Scorer: Salpigidis 51
Team: Chalkias – Torosidis, Papastathopoulos, A Papadopoulos (K Papadopoulos ▶37), Holebas – Maniatis, Katsouranis, Karagounis – Ninis (Salpigidis ▶46), Gekas (Fortounis ▶68), Samaras
Booked: Papastathopoulos ■■, Holebas ■, Karagounis ■
Sent off: Papastathopoulos ■ 44

53%	POSSESSION	47%
13	GOAL ATTEMPTS	7
4	CORNERS	3

RUSSIA 4 — CZECH REPUBLIC 1

Scorers: Dzagoev 15, 79, Shirokov 24, Pavlyuchenko 82
Team: Malafeev – Anyukov, Berezutsky, Ignashevich, Zhirkov – Shirokov, Denisov, Zyryanov – Dzagoev (Kokorin ▶84), Arshavin – Kerzhakov (Pavlyuchenko ▶73)

Scorer: Pilar 52
Team: Cech – Gebre Selassie, Hubnik, Sivok, Kadlec – Plasil, Jiracek (Petrzela ▶76) – Pilar, Rosicky, Rezek (Hubschman ▶46) – Baros (Lafata ▶85)

49%	POSSESSION	51%
17	GOAL ATTEMPTS	16
3	CORNERS	5

GREECE 1 — CZECH REPUBLIC 2

Scorer: Gekas 53
Team: Chalkias (Sifakis ▶23) – Torosidis, K Papadopoulos, Katsouranis, Holebas – Fotakis (Gekas ▶46), Maniatis, Karagounis – Salpigidis, Samaras, Fortounis (Mitroglou ▶71)
Booked: Torosidis ■, K Papadopoulos ■, Salpigidis ■

Scorers: Jiracek 3, Pilar 6
Team: Cech – Gebre Selassie, Sivok, Kadlec, Limbersky – Hubschman, Plasil – Jiracek, Rosicky (Kolar ▶46, Rajtoral ▶90), Pilar – Baros (Pekhart ▶64)
Booked: Rosicky ■, Jiracek ■, Kolar ■

54%	POSSESSION	46%
7	GOAL ATTEMPTS	8
1	CORNERS	4

POLAND 1 — RUSSIA 1

Scorer: Blaszczykowski 57
Team: Tyton – Piszczek, Wasilewski, Perquis, Boenisch – Dudka (Mierzejewski ▶73), Polanski (Matuszczyk ▶85) – Blaszczykowski, Murawski, Obraniak (Brozek ▶90+3) – Lewandowski
Booked: Lewandowski ■, Polanski ■

Scorer: Dzagoev 37
Team: Malafeev – Anyukov, Berezutsky, Ignashevich, Zhirkov – Shirokov, Denisov, Zyryanov – Dzagoev (Izmailov ▶79), Kerzhakov (Pavlyuchenko ▶70), Arshavin
Booked: Denisov ■, Dzagoev ■

43%	POSSESSION	57%
15	GOAL ATTEMPTS	7
4	CORNERS	6

GREECE 1 — RUSSIA 0

Scorer: Karagounis 45+2
Team: Sifakis – Torosidis, Papastathopoulos, K Papadopoulos, Tzavelas – Katsouranis, Maniatis – Salpigidis (Ninis ▶83), Karagounis (Makos ▶67), Samaras – Gekas (Holebas ▶64)
Booked: Karagounis ■, Holebas ■

Team: Malafeev – Anyukov (Izmailov ▶81), Berezutsky, Ignashevich, Zhirkov – Shirokov, Denisov, Glushakov (Pogrebnyak ▶72) – Dzagoev, Kerzhakov (Pavlyuchenko ▶46), Arshavin
Booked: Anyukov ■, Zhirkov ■, Dzagoev ■, Pogrebnyak ■

38%	POSSESSION	62%
5	GOAL ATTEMPTS	25
5	CORNERS	12

POLAND 0 — CZECH REPUBLIC 1

Team: Tyton – Piszczek, Wasilewski, Perquis, Boenisch – Dudka, Polanski (Grosicki ▶56) – Blaszczykowski, Murawski (Mierzejewski ▶73), Obraniak (Brozek ▶73) – Lewandowski
Booked: Murawski ■, Polanski ■, Wasilewski ■, Blaszczykowski ■, Perquis ■

Scorer: Jiracek 72
Team: Cech – Gebre Selassie, Sivok, Kadlec, Limbersky – Hubschman, Plasil – Jiracek (Rajtoral ▶84), Kolar, Pilar (Rezek ▶88) – Baros (Pekhart ▶90+1)
Booked: Limbersky ■, Plasil ■, Pekhart ■

42%	POSSESSION	58%
16	GOAL ATTEMPTS	11
6	CORNERS	6

GROUP B

Life after death

Germany cruise through, joined by Portugal, as Holland crash out

It was dubbed the group of death, a meeting with three previous champions and a former runner-up. And it was to prove tight, with all four teams going into the final round of games with hopes of reaching the quarter-finals. However, in the end Germany cruised through, winning all three matches for the first time at a European Championship.

Holland were the major casualties. In the most eagerly anticipated match of the group stage, against their old rivals Germany, the 2012 World Cup runners-up flopped. There were occasional flashes of brilliance, but star names such as Robin Van Persie, Arjen Robben and Wesley Sneijder failed to shine brightly enough.

Dutch coach Bert Van Marwijk refused to bow to public opinion back home, keeping Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and Rafael Van der Vaart on the bench for the first two games, which ended in defeat by Denmark and Germany.

Robben, one of the chief culprits, tried to spread the blame around ahead of the inevitable recriminations, claiming: "We all failed: the players, the technical staff, everyone. Just like everyone was responsible when we got to the World Cup Final in South Africa, now we are all to blame for this defeat."

Germany, meanwhile, reached the last four without ever playing exceptional football. "Three wins, three times narrowly won, three times we trembled," acknowledged federation president Wolfgang Niersbach.

Portugal were edged out of their opening game by Germany but snatched a late victory over Denmark. Cristiano Ronaldo faced criticism for missing two chances in the 3-2 victory, during which Danish fans taunted him with chants of "Messi, Messi".

Catch me if you can...Portugal skipper Ronaldo leaves Sami Khedira (left) and Jerome Boateng of Germany standing

> **"It's the same team as two years ago, except for two positions. But it just didn't work"**
> **Holland coach Bert Van Marwijk, who quit after the tournament, on his team's exit**

Afterwards, he snapped: "You know where he [Messi] was at this time [last year]? Do you know? He was being eliminated in the Copa America, in his own country. I think that's worse, no?"

Ronaldo rescued his reputation – and dragged Portugal into the quarter-finals – with a virtuoso performance against Holland, while Denmark, having sprung a surprise with their opening coup over Holland, went home defeated but not dejected.

"We are disappointed not to have gone through, but this team has a future," said coach Morten Olsen. "Maybe we lost it by not holding Portugal to a draw, but there are so many ifs and buts. When all is said and done, we have done very well."

Gavin Hamilton

Downed...Holland's Gregory Van der Wiel (right) loses out to Christian Eriksen

JUNE 9 – KHARKIV

HOLLAND 0
DENMARK 1

HT: 0-1. Att: 35,923. Ref: Skomina (Sln)

Krohn-Dehli punishes wasteful Dutch

On the receiving end of the first upset of the tournament, Holland churlishly claimed at the final whistle that victory had flattered Denmark, that their opponents had scored from the only opportunity they had created all night in sweltering Kharkiv.

Now for the alternative version, the one which suggests the *Oranje* were largely the authors of their own downfall, far too wasteful in front of goal, too disjointed and rather shaky at the back, where Feyenoord centre-back Ron Vlaar never looked at ease.

For the opening 20 minutes, Holland threatened to run riot. Ibrahim Afellay twice went close, Robin Van Persie shot wide following an Arjen Robben cut-back, while Lars Jacobsen was on hand to intervene in extremes to prevent Robben setting up another kill.

Denmark were well and truly on the ropes. So what a shock it was when they unexpectedly broke out to open the scoring on 24 minutes. Nothing much seemed on for left-winger Michael

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
GERMANY	3	3	0	0	5	2	9
PORTUGAL	3	2	0	1	5	4	6
DENMARK	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
HOLLAND	3	0	0	3	2	5	0

Krohn-Dehli after Simon Poulsen's attempted cross ricocheted into his path on the edge of the box. But thanks to his instant control and perfect balance, he was able to sweep past a couple of flat-footed defenders, accelerate and then drive the ball in through goalkeeper Maarten Stekelenburg's legs.

Apparently convinced it was just a blip, Holland continued to pour forward. Robben was desperately unlucky with a left-foot curler which hit a post, Afellay sent a rising effort narrowly over the bar and, after being put in the clear by Wesley Sneijder, the off-colour Van Persie's touch let him down, allowing keeper Stephan Andersen to block.

Following the restart, the script remained the same with stoic Danish defending, the odd counter-thrust and more Dutch near-misses, notably when skipper Mark Van Bommel forced Andersen into a fingertip save from long-distance and Robben headed wide when well positioned.

Ultimately Holland ran out of ideas and luck, their long night of misfortune underlined by the last-minute refusal of referee Damir Skomina to award a penalty when Jacobsen appeared to handle in the box. Not an evening for the Tangerine Dream.

Nick Bidwell

JUNE 9 – LVIV

GERMANY 1
PORTUGAL 0
HT: 0-0. Att: 32,990. Ref: Lannoy (Fra)

Gomez settles German nerves

No title contenders begin a tournament at their best, they need time to adjust to the stress – and that was the consolation Germany brought out of game they only won courtesy of a perfectly-placed late header from Mario Gomez.

For most of the match coach Joachim Low fumed in frustration on his bench as his team, while enjoying more of the possession, failed to produce the coherent football expected of them.

Indeed, in the first half it was Portugal, skilled and mobile as ever, who went closer to breaking the deadlock. Just before half-time Germany failed to clear a right-wing corner and Pepe saw a shot ricochet down from the angle of post and bar before bouncing on the goalline and veering across the six-yard box to safety.

An identical pattern marked the second half which produced next to nothing in the way of clear chances until the 72nd minute, when Gomez justified his selection ahead of Miroslav Klose by heading home a long right-wing cross from the tireless Sami Khedira.

Close...Germany keeper Neuer blocks a shot from Portugal's Varela

Gomez, depressed after a dreadful performance against Chelsea for Bayern Munich in the Champions League Final, was both relieved and grateful that Low had picked him to start, saying: "I had a good feeling from the start here and I wanted to give something back for the trust the coach put in me."

Portugal produced some full-hearted attacking play late on which proved they were ill-advised to have approached the game so fearfully. Nani dropped a cross-shot on the top of the bar and then only a lightning advance by Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer denied Silvestre Varela an almost-certain equaliser.

In a final flurry, Nani saw a goal-bound shot hit Holger Badstuber's back and go for a corner which Bruno Alves headed narrowly over. For leaving the best of their football until last, Portugal had only themselves to blame.

Keir Radnedge

JUNE 13 – KHARKIV

HOLLAND 1
GERMANY 2
HT: 0-2. Att: 37,750. Ref: Eriksson (Swe).

Holland fall to Gomez double

Germany's second win of the tournament might have been by the narrowest of margins, but often scorelines fail to reflect the relative merits of two teams – and there could be no doubt the *Nationalmannschaft* and *Oranje* were heading in opposite directions: up for the Germans, down for the Dutch.

Desperately needing the three points to get their campaign back on track, Holland began well, and in the sixth minute Robin Van Persie had time to take a touch but instead chose to go for a volley which he sent straight at goalkeeper Manuel Neuer.

Germany were to quick to respond in kind, a volley from playmaker Mesut Ozil cannoning off a post into the welcoming arms of Maarten Stekelenburg.

"The European Championship is like a Formula One race but without a warm-up"
Germany coach Joachim Low after his side's opening victory over Portugal

At this point Holland were giving as good as they got and, racing on to an Arjen Robben pass, Van Persie dragged a right-foot shot just wide of the mark.

Slowly but surely, however, Germany began to assert control, Holland having no answers to their slick passing and movement. On 24 minutes Germany went in front with a goal of simplicity and ruthlessness, Thomas Muller cutting in from the right to feed Bastian Schweinsteiger, who put in Mario Gomez. One brilliant turn and shot later, the ball was in the back of the net.

Now the *Nationalmannschaft* were rolling and a second goal was very much on the cards. Inevitably it was Gomez who supplied it six minutes from the break, receiving a Schweinsteiger pass in the inside-right channel and smashing it across Stekelenburg into the top corner.

Bert Van Marwijk's half-time decision to swap creator Rafael Van der Vaart and striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar for Mark Van Bommel and Ibrahim Afellay did produce something of a rally. Van Persie forced Neuer into a one-handed save and Jerome Boateng did exceptionally well to block Wesley Sneijder's goal-bound effort.

But with their jelly-like defence the Dutch were a soft touch, allowing Germany centre-back Mats Hummels to stroll forward and nearly add a third.

Seventeen minutes from time the real Van Persie finally came to life and it certainly was worth waiting for. Darting in from the left, he arrowed home an unstoppable shot past Neuer and at last Holland had some hope. But Germany know how to close out a game and could even have scored another in the last minute, substitute Miroslav Klose coming close to taking advantage of Stekelenburg's farcical attempt at dealing with a back pass.

Nick Bidwell

Foul...Van Bommel (left) and Lukas Podolksi

Heads up...Pepe's near-post flick gives Portugal the lead against Denmark

JUNE 13 – LVIV

DENMARK 2
PORTUGAL 3
HT: 1-2. Att: 31,840. Ref: Thomson (Sco)

Varela settles a thriller

Portugal unerringly bring drama of one sort or another into a tournament. The "Brazilians of Europe" have the technique to tie up in knots just about any opponents, but they struggle to maintain it over a full 90 minutes.

Hence, though they emerged from a thrill-a-minute match with the three points, it was a close-run thing. Denmark, almost in defiance of their own pragmatic instincts, became caught up in the end-to-end excitement.

Paulo Bento's men went 2-0 ahead through goals in the first 25 minutes from Pepe and Helder Postiga, before Nicklas Bendtner pulled Denmark level with goals either side of half-time.

But after Cristiano Ronaldo had twice missed badly, substitute Silvestre Varela came to Portugal's rescue with a spectacular and unconventional 87th-minute winner. Varela swiped andmissed the ball with his left foot only to bludgeon it home with his right.

A relieved Bento said: "Conceding an equaliser so late, we showed great strength of character to keep going. We should have killed the game off earlier, we had enough chances."

Denmark coach Morten Olsen admitted conceding a late winner in such circumstances threatened to prove a devastating blow to his players' attitude to the entire tournament. His consolation was in their generally resilient performance.

"It's horrible to concede so close to the end and end up losing," said Olsen. "We struggled in the first half to find our rhythm but we really improved in the second half. It may seem strange but I was prouder of our second half display here than in our win over Holland."

Keir Radnedge

Stoppages

JUNE 17 – KHARKIV

PORTUGAL 2
HOLLAND 1
HT: 1-1. Att: 37,445. Ref: Rizzoli (Ita)

Majestic Ronaldo dismisses Dutch

Cristiano Ronaldo produced the outstanding individual performance of the group stage as Portugal sent Holland home with their tails between their legs. Real Madrid's latest superstar, by his own admission, had not been the player even he had expected to be in these finals... until now, when he conjured up a display of flair and fantasy.

Ronaldo scored both Portugal's goals, hit a post twice and was denied as many goals again only by the greed or wilful blindness of team-mates – notably Nani – who preferred to shoot even when Ronaldo was better placed. Paulo Bento's men should have defeated hapless Holland far more decisively and, in the end, the Dutch might even have snatched what would been an utterly undeserved draw.

No way through...for once, Holland get the better of Ronaldo (in red)

"Before I was a hero. Now I am only Van Marwijk's son-in-law. Age has nothing to do with it – if there is a hole between our back line and midfield it is not because I am strolling around and not putting the effort in"
Holland's Mark Van Bommel

Ronaldo is not everyone's favourite as he has certain stylistic mannerisms and an air of arrogance which do not always endear him. But when in form – running, dribbling, teasing and tormenting – he is a work of wicked art.

In the first half he hit the outside of a post, had a header superbly stopped by Maarten Stekelenburg, scored Portugal's equalising goal, drew a panicky punched save from the goalkeeper and sent a diving header inches wide.

In the second half he had one shot blocked, set up an "offside goal" for Helder Postiga, ran half the pitch to set up Fabio Coentrao for a shot which was saved, set up the easiest chance of the entire finals which Nani somehow managed to miss...then showed his Manchester United successor how it should be done with a magisterially-despatched winner in the 74th minute.

In the last moments Ronaldo even hit a post again. There was only one possible candidate for the man of the match as the 27-year-old sent home the disappointing Dutch who finished pointless and bottom of the group.

Holland coach Bert Van Marwijk, against his own better instincts to judge from his earlier choices, started with both Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and Robin Van Persie, top scorers respectively in the Bundesliga and Premier League. Rafael Van der Vaart was brought in to keep the Dutchmen flying forward too and even opened the scoring after 11 minutes.

Once Ronaldo had levelled in the 28th minute, Holland subsided as their spirit and shape disintegrated. The fact that they could have snatched a draw right at the end – Van Persie missed horribly and Van der Vaart hit a post – was due only to Portugal's profligacy.

Keir Radnedge

JUNE 17 – LVIV

DENMARK 1
GERMANY 2
HT: 1-1. Att: 32,990. Ref: Velasco Carballo (Spa)

Bender too much for plucky Danes

As poised, fluent and inventive on the ball as ever, though not quite at full throttle, Germany made it three wins out of three by edging out plucky Denmark. Morten Olsen's well-drilled side headed for the exit, but at least they had the consolation of knowing that they had given their star-studded opponents more problems than any other team in the so-called "Group of Death".

They went behind after 19 minutes as Lukas Podolski, making his 100th appearance for Germany, slammed the ball home with his weaker right-foot after Mario Gomez had failed to connect with a shrewd cut-back from the right from Thomas Muller.

This Denmark side, however, are nothing if not courageous and it would not be long before they were back on terms. In an obviously-rehearsed move, Lars Jacobsen's outswinging corner to the far post was expressly meant for Nicklas Bendtner, who headed powerfully back into the centre, where Michael Krohn-Dehli nodded in.

Needless to say, Germany came roaring back and Podolski sent a screamer of a free-kick over the bar.

The energy-sapping heat was taking its toll, but Denmark were not giving up and early in the second-half they gave the Germans an awful fright, Bendtner doing excellent work as the front-line pivot before Jakob Poulsen shaved Manuel Neuer's post with a low drive.

If Germany have a weakness it is their hesitancy in dealing with an aerial threat. All night long Bendtner had the

better of his duels with their central defenders and should have had a penalty on 75 minutes when Holger Badstuber clearly held him back.

Germany always spell danger on the break and 10 minutes from time came up with the winner. Mesut Ozil's clip into the area just eluded substitute Miroslav Klose, but not impressive right-back Lars Bender who side-footed his first international goal. Brought in to replace the banned Jerome Boateng, the 23-year-old is normally a defensive midfielder for Bayer Leverkusen but who cares when he can finish like this.

Nick Bidwell

Opener...Podolski scores against Denmark in his 100th game

GROUP B FACT FILE

Left-back Jetro Willems became the youngest player ever to play at the European Championship finals. Willems was 18 years and 71 days old when he was selected for Holland's opening game against Denmark, beating the previous youngest player, Belgium's Enzo Scifo, who was 18 years and 115 days old when he played against Yugoslavia in the 1984 tournament.

German chancellor Angela Merkel caused controversy on the morning of the crunch match against Holland. Merkel, one of the central figures of the euro crisis, donned a bright orange jacket to work. German newspaper *Bild* ran a headline: "Today of all days!", while *NRC Handelsblad* in Holland asked: "Is Merkel a secret fan of the Dutch?"

Exposure...Bendtner

Denmark striker Nicklas Bendtner was fined €100,000 and banned for one World Cup qualifying match by UEFA following one of his goals in the 3-2 defeat by Portugal. Bendtner celebrated by lifting his shirt and lowering the top of his shorts to reveal the name of a betting firm emblazoned on his underpants.

Holland captain Mark Van Bommel, who was dropped by his father-in-law and coach Bert Van Marwijk on Fathers' Day, announced his international retirement.

Germany striker Lukas Podolski became the youngest European player to reach 100 caps when – aged 27 years and 13 days – he played against Denmark.

Germany were the ninth team to win all their group matches at the European Championship. Only two of the previous eight went on to become champions (France in 1984 and Spain in 2008).

GROUP B MATCH DETAILS

HOLLAND 0 — DENMARK 1

Team: Stekelenburg – Van der Wiel (Kuyt ▶85), Heitinga, Vlaar, Willems – N De Jong (Van der Vaart ▶71), Van Bommel – Robben, Sneijder, Afellay (Huntelaar ▶71) – Van Persie
Booked: Van Bommel

Scorer: Krohn-Dehli 24
Team: Andersen – Jacobsen, Kjaer, Agger, S Poulsen – Kvist, Zimling – Rommedahl (Mikkelsen ▶84), Eriksen (Schone ▶74), Krohn-Dehli – Bendtner
Booked: S Poulsen, Kvist

53%	POSSESSION	47%
28	GOAL ATTEMPTS	8
11	CORNERS	4

GERMANY 1 — PORTUGAL 0

Scorer: Gomez 72
Team: Neuer – Boateng, Hummels, Badstuber, Lahm – Khedira, Schweinsteiger – Muller (Bender ▶90+4), Ozil (Kroos ▶87), Podolski – Gomez (Klose ▶80)
Booked: Badstuber, Boateng

Team: Patricio – Pereira, Alves, Pepe, Coentrao – Meireles (Varela ▶80), Veloso, Moutinho – Nani, Postiga (Oliveira ▶70), Ronaldo
Booked: Postiga, Coentrao

56%	POSSESSION	44%
12	GOAL ATTEMPTS	11
2	CORNERS	11

HOLLAND 1 — GERMANY 2

Scorer: Van Persie 73
Team: Stekelenburg – Van der Wiel, Heitinga, Mathijsen, Willems – N De Jong, Van Bommel (Van der Vaart ▶46) – Robben (Kuyt ▶83), Sneijder, Afellay (Huntelaar ▶46) – Van Persie
Booked: N De Jong, Willems

Scorers: Gomez 24, 38
Team: Neuer – Boateng, Hummels, Badstuber, Lahm – Khedira, Schweinsteiger – Muller (Bender ▶90+2), Ozil (Kroos ▶81), Podolski – Gomez (Klose ▶72)
Booked: Boateng

52%	POSSESSION	48%
13	GOAL ATTEMPTS	12
6	CORNERS	5

DENMARK 2 — PORTUGAL 3

Scorers: Bendtner 41, 80
Team: Andersen – Jacobsen, Kjaer, Agger, S Poulsen – Kvist, Zimling (J Poulsen ▶16) – Rommedahl (Mikkelsen ▶60), Eriksen, Krohn-Dehli (Schone ▶90+2) – Bendtner
Booked: J Poulsen, Jacobsen

Scorers: Pepe 24, Postiga 36, Varela 87
Team: Patricio – Pereira, Alves, Pepe, Coentrao – Meireles (Varela ▶84), Veloso, Moutinho – Nani (Rolando ▶89), Postiga (Oliveira ▶64), Ronaldo
Booked: Meireles, Ronaldo

58%	POSSESSION	42%
9	GOAL ATTEMPTS	17
7	CORNERS	6

PORTUGAL 2 — HOLLAND 1

Scorers: Ronaldo 28, 74
Team: Patricio – Pereira, Alves, Pepe, Coentrao – Meireles (Custodio ▶72), Veloso, Moutinho – Nani (Rolando ▶87), Postiga (Oliveira ▶64), Ronaldo
Booked: Pereira

Scorer: Van der Vaart 11
Team: Stekelenburg – Van der Wiel, Vlaar, Mathijsen, Willems (Afellay ▶67) – N De Jong, Van der Vaart – Robben, Van Persie, Sneijder – Huntelaar
Booked: Willems, Van Persie

42%	POSSESSION	58%
22	GOAL ATTEMPTS	13
7	CORNERS	5

DENMARK 1 — GERMANY 2

Scorer: Krohn-Dehli 24
Team: Andersen – Jacobsen, Kjaer, Agger, S Poulsen – Kvist – Eriksen, J Poulsen (Mikkelsen ▶82), Zimling (C Poulsen ▶78), Krohn-Dehli – Bendtner

Scorers: Podolski 19, Bender 80
Team: Neuer – Bender, Hummels, Badstuber, Lahm – Khedira, Schweinsteiger – Muller (Kroos ▶84), Ozil, Podolski (Schurrle ▶64) – Gomez (Klose ▶74)

43%	POSSESSION	57%
10	GOAL ATTEMPTS	12
5	CORNERS	3

No need for arrangements

Spain and Italy go through, Croatia are unlucky but Ireland are found out

In the end, there was no "*biscotto*" – the Italian phrase for an arranged result between two parties – and Italy need not have feared that Spain and Croatia would draw 2-2 in their final group game: a result which would have sent the *Azzurri* home even if, as was expected, they beat the Republic of Ireland.

Italian fears were based on memories of Euro 2004, when Sweden and Denmark drew their final match by a similar scoreline while Italy won their game to finish level in a three-way tie. Under UEFA's head-to-head rules, Italy went out.

A repeat scenario may have appealed to the conspiracy theorists in Italy's ranks, but the reality was that Spain and Croatia were too scared of losing to get around arranging a 2-2 draw. Nerves took hold of both sides in Gdansk and only a late winner from Jesus Navas gave Spain victory.

The world and European champions won the group, with Italy as runners-up. Spain had not played well in defence of their title, but their desire for success was unquestionable.

Italy, notoriously slow starters in tournament football, had gone into Euro 2012 on the back of another match-fixing scandal at home. But just as past problems had galvanised the squad, so Italy began with purpose against Spain, drawing an absorbing match 1-1 in Gdansk, before a draw with Croatia and a victory over Ireland in their final game.

Surrounded...Spain's Andres Iniesta is hemmed in by Italy's Claudio Marchisio (left), Leonardo Bonucci (centre) and Giorgio Chiellini

La Gazzetta dello Sport

"Spain knows no biscuits"
Headline in Italian sports paper *Gazzetta dello Sport*

Croatia were edged out and could consider themselves unlucky after an emphatic opening victory over Ireland and holding their own against Italy. But they are a generation of players and a coach, Slaven Bilic, who were reaching the end of their natural cycle. The defeat by Spain was Bilic's last game in charge of the national side and he now heads off to Russia and Lokomotiv Moscow.

Ireland became the first team to be eliminated from Euro 2012. The optimism of their fans proved unfounded and their limitations were exposed very early on in defeats by Croatia and Spain.

Gavin Hamilton

JUNE 10 – GDANSK

SPAIN 1
ITALY 1
HT: 0-0. Att: 43,615. Ref: Kassai (Hun)

Ambitious Italy worry champions

Spain blamed the state of the pitch in Gdansk for their failure to find their true passing rhythm in an absorbing draw with Italy. "The pitch is a disaster," said Cesc Fabregas. "It's lamentable to play on a pitch like that."

In truth, the pitch had little to do with it. Spain faced an Italy side who showed meritable attacking ambition, enjoyed an equal amount of possession and deservedly took the lead through substitute Antonio Di Natale. Spain eventually found their passing stride to equalise through Fabregas.

Spain coach Vicente Del Bosque had sprung a surprise with his selection, opting to play without a recognised striker. Instead Fabregas played the "withdrawn striker" role and Fernando Torres, scorer of the winner in the Final four years ago, was left on the bench.

Italy coach Cesare Prandelli deployed midfielder Daniele De Rossi at centre-back in a 3-5-2 formation in which the wing-backs helped to deny space to Spain's fluid midfield.

Far from containing Spain, Italy enjoyed a number of attacking moments in the first half. Andrea Pirlo's free-kick was pushed away by Iker Casillas, who also saved well from Thiago Motta's header.

Andres Iniesta was the most effective performer for Spain and had the best chance of the first half but, after being played in by Xavi, his shot was well saved by Gianluigi Buffon.

While Italy's midfield enjoyed possession on a par with Spain, their attack lacked real threat. Mario Balotelli had a great chance to open the scoring when he robbed Sergio Ramos in possession and headed towards Casillas, but he hesitated long enough for Ramos to recover and block the shot. Balotelli was substituted shortly afterwards.

His replacement, Di Natale, had an immediate impact, running on to Pirlo's disguised pass and dispatching the ball past Casillas.

Spain's response was emphatic. Their equaliser came as the result of a passing move that vindicated Del Bosque's choice of a strikerless formation. Xavi, Iniesta and David Silva

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SPAIN	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
ITALY	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
CROATIA	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
REP OF IRELAND	3	0	0	3	1	9	0

Opener...Di Natale hails his goal against Spain

swapped passes in the build-up before Fabregas popped up on the edge of the area to fire home Silva's angled pass.

The equaliser aside, Spain's passing had lacked its usual fluency and they jabbed at Italy without landing a killer blow. The arrival of Torres as a substitute for Fabregas for the final 16 minutes offered a chance to be more menacing, but he fluffed two great chances to claim the winner. First he was foiled by Buffon after delaying his shot when clean through, then he chipped over an open goal.

A winner for Spain at such a late stage would have been unfair on Italy, who had contributed their fair share to an intriguing match as the sides laid down markers as the ones to beat in this tournament.

"Italy didn't just sit back," Del Bosque conceded. "They played us face to face. They were as daring and as good as our team are."

Gavin Hamilton

JUNE 10 – POZNAN

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND 1
CROATIA 3

HT: 1-2. Att: 43,200. Ref: Kuipers (Hol)

Irish given a wake-up call

The Republic of Ireland had waited 24 years to play in the European Championship again and had gone into the tournament on the back of a 14-game unbeaten run. However, it took less than three minutes for the scale of the task facing them in Poland to become abundantly clear.

Mario Mandzukic's header gave Croatia an early lead and controversy was to follow over whether their second goal was offside. The Irish also had claims for a penalty after Robbie Keane was fouled, but overall Giovanni Trapattoni's side could not dispute Croatia's authority.

Ireland goalkeeper Shay Given had been troubled by injury in training during the previous week and was possibly unsighted for Croatia's opening goal. Mandzukic struck his header as he stumbled forward following Ireland's failure to clear a corner.

After that, the Irish gameplan to hit Croatia on the counter-attack required a serious re-think.

A set-piece was always going to be their best bet and a free-kick on 19 minutes, whipped in by Aiden McGeady, gave Sean St Ledger the chance to head home an equaliser from close range.

But Irish celebrations turned to frustration before the break when Nikica Jelavic put Croatia back in front. The Everton forward was in an offside position when Luka Modric's shot was deflected into his path. The ball had struck defender Stephen Ward but he said he was impeded by Mandzukic.

Ireland, however, could have no

Aerial battle...Ireland defend a Croatia corner

complaints at Croatia's third goal, scored shortly after half-time – only frustration at the space allowed to Mandzukic, whose header from Ivan Perisic's cross cannoned back off a post, on to Given's head and in.

The Irish could feel even more hard done by in the 63rd minute, when Keane was tripped by Gordon Schildenfeld and their appeals for a penalty were rejected by Dutch referee Bjorn Kuipers.

A goal at that stage would have made for an exciting finish, but Croatia were still worthy winners. They enjoyed far greater possession, much of it orchestrated by Modric.

"We were unlucky," said Trapattoni. "But the first goal was our mistake – maybe Shay didn't see it, but to concede after three minutes affected us psychologically.

"Their second goal was clearly offside, by two metres, when the first shot was taken. But Croatia deserved to win because they were superior."

John Holmesdale

"Spain are like an orchestra. They involve everyone. They very rarely misplace passes"
Ireland boss Giovanni Trapattoni

JUNE 14 – GDANSK

SPAIN 4
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND 0

HT: 1-0. Att: 36, 572. Ref: Proenca (Por)

Torres sends Ireland home

Irish fans descended on Gdansk in their thousands hoping for a miracle that would keep them in the tournament. A win over the world and European champions was always unrealistic but they did witness Fernando Torres scoring twice as Spain reminded everyone why they are fêted by so many.

The 4-0 scoreline was Ireland's heaviest defeat under Giovanni Trapattoni's management and it meant Ireland became the first team to be eliminated from the tournament.

While they had conceded after three minutes against Croatia, they lasted barely another 60 seconds before going behind to Spain. Torres – in for Cesc Fabregas in the starting line-up, after Vicente Del Bosque re-jigged his formation – scored the fastest-ever goal for Spain at a European Championship. Andres Iniesta found David Silva in the penalty area. He was challenged by Richard Dunne, but the ball fell to Torres, who struck it past Shay Given from close range.

The goal set the tone for the rest of the match, with Ireland chasing Spanish shadows. The final scoreline could easily have been larger were it not for Given, who saved brilliantly from Xavi, but his mistake set up Spain's second goal in the 49th minute. He fluffed a shot from Iniesta and the ball fell to Silva, who, faced by three defenders, twisted and turned before stroking the ball into the net.

It was 3-0 when Ireland were caught in possession and Silva put Torres clear to finish with confidence. He was subbed a few minutes later for Fabregas, who soon added a fourth as Spain rolled on and Ireland ducked out.

John Holmesdale

Mesmerising...Spain's Silva threads the ball home past three Irish defenders

On the attack...Italy's Antonio Casano (no10) against Croatia

JUNE 14 – POZNAN

ITALY 1
CROATIA 1
HT: 1-0. Att: 37,096. Ref: Webb (Eng).

Croatia's Mario steals the show

Much of the pre-match talk had been taken up with discussion of Mario Balotelli, who kept his place in Italy's starting line-up despite a lacklustre performance in the opening game against Spain.

But it was another Mario – Mandzukic – who stole the headlines after his 72nd-minute equaliser maintained Croatia's proud record of never having lost to Italy.

"They only had one chance, one cross, and that ruined everything we had built up," complained Italy coach Cesare Prandelli.

Italy certainly had the upper hand in the first half as Croatia's key midfielder Luka Modric struggled to assert his influence. Croatia felt they should have had a penalty midway through the half after Giorgio Chiellini pulled back Nikica Jelavic but their appeals were ignored by referee Howard Webb.

Instead, Italy took the lead. Croatia goalkeeper Stipe Pletikosa had pulled off a fine double save to deny Thiago Motta a few minutes earlier, but he was powerless to stop a majestic free-kick from Andrea Pirlo, who fizzed the ball over the defensive wall and inside Pletikosa's right-hand post.

Italy then searched in vain for the second goal to kill off the game. Antonio Di Natale replaced the frustrating Balotelli who looked sharp early on but failed to find the target with a series of long-range efforts. In the end it was a re-jig by Croatia that turned the game.

"We lacked aggression. I wanted more players in possession in midfield," Croatia coach Slaven Bilic said afterwards of his introduction of Danijel Pranjic for Ivan Perisic. "Mandzukic went deeper, Ivan Rakitic went on the wing and Luka Modric was pressing their defence."

"I will go on as a coach but will never be as proud as I am now because being national coach is a unique experience"
Croatia's departing boss Slaven Bilic

Pranjic played a key role in setting up Ivan Strinic, who crossed from deep for the equaliser. Chiellini mistimed his jump and Mandzukic had time to bring the ball down and fire past Gianluigi Buffon for his third goal of the tournament.

"We should have killed off the game when we were in charge," Pirlo said. "We had chances but we couldn't put the ball in the back of the net."

Gavin Hamilton

JUNE 18 – GDANSK

CROATIA 0
SPAIN 1
HT: 0-0. Att: 38,371. Ref: Stark (Ger)

Navas rescues jittery Spain

Spain may have been the defending champions and pre-tournament favourites but this was not a performance to confirm the belief of some that Vicente Del Bosque's side are the best of their generation.

Only when substitute Jesus Navas scored with two minutes remaining could Spain breathe out and relax. The tension that had built up during the match was dissipated by a goal that ensured Spain would top the group and Croatia exited the tournament.

Both sides took a cautious, nervous approach from the start. "We were waiting for the last 30 minutes to attack more and risk more," Croatia coach Slaven Bilic admitted afterwards.

Spain started with Fernando Torres but again struggled to find a decisive touch in the penalty area. When Torres forced his way through down the right, there was nobody in the box and he was forced to shoot from a tight angle, Stipe Pletikosa saving comfortably.

Croatia relied on containment and counter-attack. They had claims for a penalty in the first half when Sergio Ramos upended Mario Mandzukic on the edge of the area, but Ramos had taken some of the ball before taking both of Mandzukic's legs.

Saved...Casillas of Spain blocks a header from Croatia's Rakitic (right)

Croatia enjoyed their best chance on the hour. The increasingly influential Luka Modric struck quickly after Xavi was robbed of possession. He swept forward and delivered a delicious cross with the outside of his boot to Ivan Rakitic, whose header was brilliantly saved by Iker Casillas.

A Croatia goal would have sent Spain out of the tournament and Bilic finally abandoned his lone striker formation, adding Nikica Jelavic to the mix. An Ivan Perisic volley, set up by the run of Modric, was the closest they came.

Del Bosque ended with no strikers, with Torres and David Silva off and Navas on to provide greater width.

And it was Navas who was to have the last word, albeit in controversial circumstances. Cesc Fabregas chipped over the Croatia defence and Andres Iniesta controlled the ball with his shoulder before squaring it for Navas to walk into the net. Iniesta had been just onside, Navas was offside when his team-mate was played through but deemed not to be interfering with play.

"It was a very difficult victory. We suffered, but they did too," Del Bosque said. "We did not have much strength to go forward. We didn't have the clarity and control we usually have."

John Holmesdale

JUNE 18 – POZNAN

ITALY 2
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND 0
HT: 1-0. Att: 38,794. Ref: Cakir (Tur)

No easy ride for Italy

Ireland were already out but salvaged some pride for their supporters with this performance in Gdansk as they made Italy sweat for the win they needed to progress to the quarter-finals.

An early mistake by Andrea Pirlo let in Kevin Doyle after just 20 seconds but he could not keep his footing. That was as close as Ireland would come to scoring from open play in the entire 90 minutes.

The Italians found their stride on the half hour. Antonio Di Natale, who had been preferred to Mario Balotelli, rounded Shay Given and fizzed in a shot from a near-impossible angle that was cleared off the line by Sean St Ledger.

The Italian breakthrough came soon afterwards, in the 35th minute. Given fumbled Antonio Cassano's shot, and from the corner Cassano headed in at the near post. Damien Duff attempted to hook it clear but the ball had clearly crossed the line.

Italy continued to search for a second

goal in the second half as Richard Dunne made a crucial block to deny Cassano, Daniele De Rossi shot over and Given saved from Di Natale.

Keith Andrews finally tested Gianluigi Buffon with a long range free-kick midway in the second half but Irish frustration boiled over when Andrews was sent off after collecting a second yellow card for dissent.

Substitute Balotelli did his best to steal the limelight, scoring with a stunning volley from Alessandro Diamanti's injury-time corner that chalked up Italy's second. The Manchester City striker then appeared ready to vent his feelings towards coach Cesare Prandelli, but defender Leonardo Bonucci wisely clamped his hand over his volatile team-mate's mouth.

Gavin Hamilton

Ouch...Italy's Andrea Barzagli (right) clashes with Robbie Keane of Ireland

GROUP C FACT FILE

UEFA fined the Croatian Football Federation €80,000 after supporters racially abused Italy's Mario Balotelli.

Xavi set a new record, in Spain's 4-0 win against the Republic of Ireland, for the number of passes by an individual player during a European Championship match. His total of 136 attempted passes – he completed an astonishing 127 – eclipsed the previous best of 117 attempts set by Holland's Ronald Koeman against Denmark in 1992.

Tragedy...fan's body is recovered

A Republic of Ireland fan was found dead in a canal in Bydgoszcz, northern Poland, after an apparent accident. James Nolan, a 21-year-old student, had travelled in a camper van to Poland with friends to follow their team. An autopsy concluded he had drowned in accidental circumstances.

GROUP C MATCH DETAILS

SPAIN 1 – ITALY 1

Scorer: Fabregas 64
Team: Casillas – Arbeloa, Pique, Ramos, Alba – Xavi, Busquets, Alonso – Silva (Navas ▶65), Fabregas (Torres ▶74), Iniesta
Booked: Alba, Arbeloa, Torres (84)

Scorer: Di Natale 60
Team: Buffon – Chiellini, De Rossi, Bonucci – Giaccherini, Marchisio, Pirlo, Motta (Nocerino ▶90), Maggio – Cassano (Giovinco ▶65), Balotelli (Di Natale ▶56)
Booked: Balotelli, Bonucci, Chiellini, Maggio

60%	POSSESSION	40%
18	GOAL ATTEMPTS	10
7	CORNERS	2

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND 1 – CROATIA 3

Scorer: St Ledger 19
Team: Given – O'Shea, St Ledger, Dunne, Ward – McGeady (Cox ▶54), Whelan, Andrews, Duff – Doyle (Walters ▶53), Keane (Long ▶75)
Booked: Andrews

Scorers: Mandzukic 3, 48, Jelavic 43
Team: Pletikosa – Srna, Corluka, Schildenfeld, Strinic – Vukojevic – Rakitic (Dujmovic ▶90), Modric, Perisic (Eduardo ▶89) – Mandzukic, Jelavic (Kranjcar ▶72)
Booked: Modric, Kranjcar (84)

45%	POSSESSION	55%
13	GOAL ATTEMPTS	15
1	CORNERS	7

ITALY 1 – CROATIA 1

Scorer: Pirlo 39
Team: Buffon – Bonucci, De Rossi, Chiellini – Maggio, Marchisio, Pirlo, Motta (Montolivo 63), Giaccherini – Balotelli (Di Natale 70), Cassano (Giovinco 83)
Booked: Motta, Montolivo

Scorer: Mandzukic 72
Team: Pletikosa – Srna, Corluka, Schildenfeld, Strinic – Rakitic, Vukojevic, Modric, Perisic (Pranjic 68) – Jelavic (Eduardo 83), Mandzukic (Kranjcar 90)
Booked: Schildenfeld

52%	POSSESSION	48%
15	GOAL ATTEMPTS	10
6	CORNERS	3

SPAIN 4 – REPUBLIC OF IRELAND 0

Scorers: Torres 4, 70, Silva 49, Fabregas 83
Team: Casillas – Arbeloa, Pique, Ramos, Alba – Xavi, Busquets, Alonso (Martinez ▶65) – Silva, Torres (Fabregas ▶74), Iniesta (Cazorla ▶80)
Booked: Alonso, Martinez

Team: Given – O'Shea, St Ledger, Dunne, Ward – Duff (McClean ▶76), Andrews, Whelan (Green ▶80), McGeady – Cox (Walters ▶46), Keane
Booked: Keane, Whelan, St Ledger

66%	POSSESSION	34%
26	GOAL ATTEMPTS	6
8	CORNERS	2

CROATIA 0 – SPAIN 1

Team Pletikosa – Vida (Jelavic ▶66), Corluka, Schildenfeld, Strinic – Srna, Vukojevic (Eduardo ▶81), Rakitic, Pranjic (Perisic ▶65) – Modric – Mandzukic
Booked: Corluka, Srna, Strinic, Mandzukic, Jelavic, Rakitic

Scorer: Navas 88
Team: Casillas – Arbeloa, Pique, Ramos, Alba – Xavi (Negredo ▶89), Busquets, Alonso – Silva (Fabregas ▶73), Torres (Navas ▶61), Iniesta

36%	POSSESSION	64%
5	GOAL ATTEMPTS	14
4	CORNERS	11

ITALY 2 – REPUBLIC OF IRELAND 0

Scorers: Cassano 35, Balotelli 90
Team: Buffon – Abate, Barzagli, Chiellini (Bonucci ▶57), Balzaretti – Pirlo – Marchisio, Motta, De Rossi – Di Natale (Balotelli ▶75), Cassano (Diamanti ▶63)
Booked: Balzaretti, De Rossi, Buffon

Team: Given – O'Shea, Dunne, St Ledger, Ward – McGeady (Long ▶65), Whelan, Andrews, Duff – Keane (Cox ▶86), Doyle (Walters ▶76)
Booked: Andrews (two), O'Shea, St Ledger
Sent-off: Andrews 89

60%	POSSESSION	40%
27	GOAL ATTEMPTS	6
12	CORNERS	5

England's lucky turn

Co-hosts Ukraine go out after "phantom" goal and France end drought

Luck has not always been on England's side in major tournaments. Frank Lampard's "phantom" goal against Germany in 2010 was immediately recalled when Marko Devych's perfectly good goal for Ukraine was ignored by match officials in the final group game against England in Kiev.

The controversy placed Michel Platini's scheme for goal-line officials (additional assistant referees, AARs) in the spotlight, with FIFA president Sepp Blatter, a recent convert to goal-line technology (GLT), declaring: "GLT is no longer an alternative but a necessity."

UEFA refereeing chief Pierluigi Collina conceded that "the ball crossed the line", but added: "It is one negative decision in three years of Champions League and two years of Europa League and 24 matches at the Euros."

Nevertheless, the team of Hungarian officials, including the AAR, Istvan Vad, who missed Devych's goal despite being just feet away, was sent home from the tournament following the incident.

England enjoyed good fortune against Ukraine, but to assign all of their results to luck would be to ignore the work done by manager Roy Hodgson in his short time in charge.

The 1-0 defeat of Ukraine knocked the co-hosts out of the competition and confirmed England as group winners.

A victory over England had been the target for Oleg Blohkin's side – not only in terms of Ukraine's footballing prospects, but also in order to put a positive focus back on the tournament after all the negative scars surrounding preparations: from the delays over the stadia, to a political boycott by European Union leaders, to profiteering hotel owners who overcharged fans.

Talking point...the ball is over the line as England's John Terry stretches to clear a shot from Devych, but the goal was not given

> **"For us to get seven points with two victories and a draw probably exceeds everyone's expectations"**
> **England manager Roy Hodgson**

The greatest responsibility of replying out on the pitch was handed to Andriy Shevchenko, who was way past his prime and – according to many local fans and observers – included in Blokhin's squad as a sympathetic gesture.

Not that Blokhin is one for sympathetic gestures. This became clear during a press conference after the defeat by England when he invited a critical local journalist to settle their argument outside "one to one, man to man".

For a third major tournament in a row, the hosts failed to make it beyond the group stages as Ukraine followed co-hosts Poland in the way of Austria and Switzerland in 2008, and South Africa at the World Cup 2010.

France went through as runners-up, playing down reports of a dressing-room row following the defeat by Sweden.

Assistant coach Alain Boghossian said: "There were some changes in the mood of players after the last match.

"We did not play very well. The players had their say but it is normal to have emotional discussions after a game. If they are emotional, it is not a problem."

Gavin Hamilton

JUNE 11 – DONETSK

FRANCE 1
ENGLAND 1
HT: 1-1. Att: 47,400. Ref: Rizzoli (Ita)

Gritty England hold out

This was only Roy Hodgson's third game in charge of England, but he could be more than content with the outcome as his side held out for a point against technically superior opposition.

England had one attempt on target in the entire 90 minutes – Joleon Lescott's header which resulted in the English goal – compared to 15 for France. Laurent Blanc's side enjoyed plenty of possession through the talented trio of Karim Benzema, Franck Ribery and Samir Nasri, assisted by thrusting right-back Mathieu Debuchy. But for all their superior possession they created very little in the box.

That was testament to the exhaustive efforts of Steven Gerrard and Scott Parker in England's midfield and the developing central defensive partnership of Lescott and former captain John Terry.

It was clear that Hodgson had brought spirit and defensive organisation to the side in his short time in charge. England set up in a compact formation with two banks of four behind centre-forward Danny Welbeck.

Such a set-up made it hard for France's front line to break through and it was England who had the best early chance. Parker and Ashley Young exchanged passes to send James Milner through, but although he took the ball past French goal keeper Hugo Lloris he could only direct his shot off target from a wide angle.

England took the lead from a set-

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	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ENGLAND	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
FRANCE	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
UKRAINE	3	1	0	2	2	4	3
SWEDEN	3	1	0	2	5	5	3

Blockade...England crowd out Philippe Mexes

piece, a free-kick whipped in from the right flank by Gerrard and headed in by Lescott, who had slipped away from Alou Diarra, the defensive midfielder who came into the side in the place of the injured Yann M'Vila.

Diarra almost made amends a few minutes later but Joe Hart saved his powerful header from close range.

A goal to the good, England began to sit back and soak up the French pressure. But they were defending too deeply and from a corner allowed Nasri the time and space to fire a low shot through a crowd of players past his Manchester City team-mate Hart.

The second half brought a rearguard action from England and for the most part they denied France any real threat. A shot from Benzema, well held by Hart, and a volley from Yohan Cabaye, which deflected wide, were the only attempts to threaten the English goal.

John Holmesdale

JUNE 11 – KIEV

UKRAINE 2
SWEDEN 1
HT: 0-0. Att: 64,290. Ref: Cakir (Tur)

Shevchenko the hero

Ukraine showed Poland the way to make the most of home advantage as they roared back from a goal down to beat Sweden.

Whereas co-hosts Poland had started on fire against Greece then fizzled out for a draw, Ukraine exploded to victory following the provocation of a Swedish goal early in the second half. In a first half of few openings, it appeared as if the occasion was too much for the hosts as Andriy Shevchenko snatched at two half-chances.

Sweden, having started cautiously, duly took the lead in the 52nd minute. Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Shevchenko's striking successor at Milan, turning in an assist from Kim Kallstrom.

Shevchenko then duly picked up the gauntlet thrown down by the bigger, more powerful, younger man. Two classic headers from the smallest man on the pitch turned the game around and earned Shevchenko a standing ovation from the crowd on behalf of a grateful nation.

First, he got ahead of marker Olof Mellberg to head home Andriy Yarmolenko's cross and send the Olympic Stadium wild. Minutes later he repeated the trick to divert home Yarmolenko's corner at the near post.

He and coach Oleg Blokhin embraced in shared triumph at the final whistle. Inevitably Shevchenko was nominated as man of the match. As he said: "If I dreamed one last night, I couldn't have dreamed a better one than tonight."

Keir Radnedge

Head man...Shevchenko scores Ukraine's winner

JUNE 15 – DONETSK

UKRAINE 0
FRANCE 2
HT: 0-0. Att: 48,000. Ref: Kuipers (Hol)

France make light of storm

An incredible thunderstorm in Donetsk threatened to force the match to be abandoned when Dutch referee Bjorn Kuipers took the players off after just four minutes.

UEFA officials toyed with the idea of continuing the match 24 hours later. But, amazingly, the Donbass Arena pitch survived the deluge and the match re-started one hour after the original kick-off. The ball fizzed around the wet surface and France romped to a comfortable victory.

The exciting French attack which had been constrained by England found no such problems here.

Midfielder Jeremy Menez, who was preferred ahead of Florent Malouda, twice brought saves from Andriy Pyatov early on, with the Ukraine fourth-choice goalkeeper also saving superbly from a Philippe Mexes header.

"When the game was suspended, our fear was that we wouldn't get to play it. We really wanted to play; we'd prepared for it"
France coach Laurent Blanc

There was an early chance for Andriy Shevchenko, hero of his country's first match, but he shot straight at Hugo Lloris and that was as good as it got for the hosts.

Menez was lucky to be on the pitch for the second half. Having been booked early on, he deserved a second for a late tackle on Yevhen Selin in first-half injury time. Instead of an early departure, Menez gave France the lead as they consolidated their superiority during a short second-half spell.

Played in by Karim Benzema eight minutes into the second half, Menez stepped inside Selin and beat Pyatov with a left-footed shot that fizzed inside the near post.

France built on their lead with an equally well-worked effort from Yohan Cabaye a few minutes later. Benzema was once again the creator, picking out Cabaye, who wriggled clear of Oleg Husiev before drilling the ball into the far corner.

Benzema and Franck Ribery were a constant threat for France and Ukraine, who had so impressed in their opening match, could not compete.

Cabaye almost added a third when a half-volley from the edge of the penalty area rattled a post.

It was a long overdue victory for France, who had not won in a major tournament since beating Portugal in the 2006 World Cup semi-final.

Coach Laurent Blanc said: "Six years is quite a long time to not win a game, so I hope the next victory isn't another six years because I won't be here to speak to you. I will be long fired by then."

John Holmesdale

Drenched...referee Bjorn Kuipers takes the teams off in a Donetsk storm

Clever...Welbeck's flick provides England's winner against Sweden

JUNE 15 – KIEV

SWEDEN 2
ENGLAND 3
HT: 0-1. Att: 64,640. Ref: Skomina (Sln)

Welbeck settles a thriller

The thunder, lightning and torrential rain may have been in Donetsk, but the storm of a football match was in Kiev where England's error-wracked dismissal of Sweden meant they now needed only a draw in their last group match against co-hosts Ukraine.

But Roy Hodgson's men made life immeasurably, unnecessarily difficult for themselves. They led 1-0, gave away two soft goals to trail 2-1 then recovered – sparked by the introduction of substitute Theo Walcott – to win.

Sweden coach Erik Hamren was inconsolable. "We have a saying," he grimaced. "The operation went really well but the patient died."

That illustrated the contradictory nature of a game strewn with few memorable moves and countless errors, yet which was utterly compelling.

And England, as Hodgson said several times into his post-match analysis, still had Wayne Rooney ready and itching to join the action now that he had purged his two-game suspension.

Hodgson, who had built his youthful coaching reputation in Sweden, of all places, went with a very English tactic – the big centre-forward – in the shape of Andy Carroll, with which England attacked the occasion.

Carroll repaid his manager's faith by heading England in front in the 23rd minute. Skipper Steven Gerrard delivered a long, angled centre from back and deep on the right and Carroll left Olof Mellberg and Jonas Olsson flat-footed to power it home.

Mellberg achieved personal revenge by heading the two goals which put Sweden ahead – one of which Glen Johnson turned into his own net. But it proved short-lived. First Walcott struck an equaliser out of nowhere, and then Mellberg and his defensive colleagues were left foundering once more as the Arsenal winger laid on a pirouetted winner for Danny Welbeck.

Contentiously Mellberg was selected as man of the match by old France hero Christian Karembeu.

"It doesn't mean a lot," said Mellberg, disappointment outweighing diplomacy. "It's a bit strange to win something when you go out of a tournament."

Keir Radnedge

"I have worked with them for one month and I'm still learning what they are really good at and what areas we can improve upon"
England manager Roy Hodgson

JUNE 19 – KIEV

SWEDEN 2
FRANCE 0
HT: 0-0. Att: 63,010. Ref: Proenca (Por)

Ibrahimovic flattens France

Sweden were already out and preparing to head home, but coach Erik Hamren resisted the chance to reshuffle his team to give the reserves a tournament experience. Instead, he made just two changes to the team that had lost in such dramatic fashion to England. Ola Toivanen came in for Johan Elmander in attack, while Emir Bajrami replaced injured midfielder Rasmus Elm.

The Swedes rose to the occasion while France, with half an eye on the quarter-finals, wilted under a sustained assault, losing a 23-match unbeaten run after suffering a first defeat by their opponents for almost 43 years.

Laurent Blanc was fulsome in his praise of the opposition, saying: "Sweden dominated us in terms of the tackles, in the air and on the ground throughout the game. We couldn't fight the physical presence they imposed."

There could be no shame in losing to a goal of the quality of that scored by Zlatan Ibrahimovic on 54 minutes. When Sebastian Larsson crossed from the right, the Swedish captain was loitering on the edge of the area. He adjusted his body, twisted and connected beautifully with a volley that flew past Hugo Lloris.

Larsson lashed in a second for Sweden in injury time after substitute Christian Wilhelmsson hit the bar. For Hamren, the result boded well for the forthcoming World Cup qualifiers. "I'm very happy for their sake because they behaved like winners," he said.

John Holmesdale

Show stopper...Ibrahimovic volleys Sweden ahead against France

JUNE 19 – DONETSK

ENGLAND 1
UKRAINE 0
HT: 0-0. Att: 48,700. Ref: Kassai (Hun)

Rooney makes the difference

"Football," said Roy Hodgson on the eve of the clash with co-hosts Ukraine, "is all about dreams." This victory kept England's dream alive but, as with the previous despatch of Sweden, it was not without its heart-stopping moments.

If Ukraine had boasted a Wayne Rooney then they, and not, England would have advanced to the quarter-finals. But in the Donbass Arena they had only an ageing, half-fit Andriy Shevchenko and his 20 minutes was not enough to trump 80 minutes of even a ring-rusty Rooney back from suspension.

Not that England complained – they even finished top of Group D. But they did enjoy one massive slice of luck when, leading 1-0, they saw Ukraine denied an equaliser by the incompetence of a linesman and goal-line assistant.

Ukraine regretted the knee injury which kept talismanic Shevchenko on the subs' bench – not that they appeared weakened as they began with fire, movement and pace.

Andriy Yarmolenko was too slow to pounce when presented with space on the edge of the penalty box, Marko Devych had a drive blocked by Scott Parker and Oleh Husiev capitalised on a nervy misjudgment from Ashley Young to dash in from the right and graze the top of the bar.

Nearly half an hour had gone before England manufactured a chance – and a good one, too. The otherwise off-form Young crossed and Rooney, unmarked at the far post, glanced his header wide. It was as if the ball had come on to him faster than he expected, the mark of a player short of match sharpness.

Ukraine pulled themselves together. Joe Hart saved from Yarmolenko, who then wriggled through only for Joleon Lescott to whip the ball off his toes.

Three minutes into the second half Ukraine were punished for their lack of attacking edge. Gerrard beat a defender on the right and crossed. The ball was

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deflected by one defender, misjudged by keeper Andriy Pyatov and headed in from close range by Rooney for his 29th goal in his 75th international.

Ukraine should have been level in the 61st minute when Devych broke through the centre. His shot was deflected into the air by Hart and was falling over the line as John Terry hooked it back into play. Television replays showed it was a goal, but ref Viktor Kassai waved play on because his linesman and goal-line assistant signalled nothing.

Oleg Blokhin brought on Shevchenko but it was too little, too late. Their luck was out and England's joy was complete with news that France had lost.

Keir Radnedge

"There are five referees on the pitch and the ball is 50cm behind the goal line. Write what you want. You've seen it"
Ukraine coach Oleg Blokhin offers advice to journalists after the "goal" against England

My ball...Ukraine's Denys Harmarsh keeps Rooney at bay

GROUP D FACT FILE

England striker Jermain Defoe had to return home shortly after his country's arrival in Krakow after the death of his father from cancer. He rejoined the squad two days before their opening game against France and appeared as a 77th-minute substitute. He then returned to England for his father's funeral.

Landmark...Shevchenko

Andriy Shevchenko's two goals against Sweden meant the 35-year-old became the oldest player to score twice in one game at a European Championship. He announced his retirement from international football after the 1-0 defeat by England.

France's 2-0 win against co-hosts Ukraine was their first in the history of the European Championship without either Michel Platini or Zinedine Zidane in their team.

Ashley Cole's appearance for England against Ukraine was his 21st in an international tournament, setting a new national record.

England won their group at the European Championship for the second time. The first was on home soil in 1996.

Before his goal against Ukraine, Wayne Rooney had not scored in 10 hours and 26 minutes of football at World Cups and Euros.

GROUP D MATCH DETAILS

FRANCE 1 — ENGLAND 1

Scorer: Nasri 39
Team: Lloris – Debuchy, Rami, Mexes, Evra – Diarra - Nasri, Cabaye (Ben Arfa ▶84), Malouda (Martin ▶85), Ribery – Benzema

Scorer: Lescott 30
Team: Hart – Johnson, Terry, Lescott, Cole – Milner, Gerrard, Parker (Henderson ▶78), Oxlade-Chamberlain (Defoe ▶77) – Young – Welbeck (Walcott ▶90)
Booked: Oxlade-Chamberlain, Young

60%	POSSESSION	40%
19	GOAL ATTEMPTS	3
11	CORNERS	4

UKRAINE 2 — SWEDEN 1

Scorer: Shevchenko 55, 61
Team: Pyatov – Husiev, Mykhalyk, Khacheridi, Selin – Yarmolenko, Tymoshchuk, Konoplyanka (Devych ▶90+3) – Voronin (Rotan ▶85), Nazarenko, Shevchenko (Milevskyi ▶81)

Scorer: Ibrahimovic 52
Team: Isaksson – Lustig, Mellberg, Granqvist, M Olsson – Larsson (Wilhelmsson ▶68), Elm, Kallstrom, Toivonen (Svensson ▶62) – Ibrahimovic – Rosenberg (Elmander ▶71)
Booked: Kallstrom, Elm

53%	POSSESSION	47%
13	GOAL ATTEMPTS	12
3	CORNERS	2

UKRAINE 0 — FRANCE 2

Team: Pyatov – Husiev, Mykhalyk, Khacheridi, Selin – Tymoshchuk, Voronin (Devych ▶46) – Yarmolenko (Aliyev ▶68), Nazarenko (Milevskyi ▶60), Konoplyanka – Shevchenko
Booked: Selin, Tymoshchuk

Scorers: Menez 53, Cabaye 56
Team: Lloris – Debuchy, Rami, Mexes, Clichy – Diarra - Menez (Martin ▶73), Nasri, Cabaye (M'Vila ▶68), Ribery – Benzema (Giroud ▶76)
Booked: Menez, Debuchy, Mexes

48%	POSSESSION	52%
9	GOAL ATTEMPTS	16
5	CORNERS	6

SWEDEN 2 — ENGLAND 3

Scorers: Johnson 49og, Mellberg 59
Team: Isaksson – Granqvist (Lustig ▶66), Mellberg, J Olsson, M Olsson – Svensson, Kallstrom – Larsson, Ibrahimovic, Elm (Wilhelmsson ▶81) – Elmander (Rosenberg ▶79)
Booked: Mellberg, J Olsson, Svensson

Scorers: Carroll 23, Walcott 64, Welbeck 78
Team: Hart – Johnson, Terry, Lescott, Cole – Milner (Walcott ▶61), Gerrard, Parker, Young – Welbeck (Oxlade-Chamberlain ▶90), Carroll
Booked: Milner

48%	POSSESSION	52%
12	GOAL ATTEMPTS	15
3	CORNERS	3

SWEDEN 2 — FRANCE 0

Scorers: Ibrahimovic 54, Larsson 90+1
Team: Isaksson – Granqvist, Mellberg, J Olsson, M Olsson – Svensson (Holmen ▶78), Kallstrom – Larsson, Ibrahimovic, Bajrami (Wilhelmsson ▶46) – Toivonen (Wernbloom ▶78)
Booked: Svensson, Holmen

Team: Lloris – Debuchy, Rami, Mexes, Clichy – Diarra – Ben Arfa (Malouda ▶59), Nasri (Menez ▶77), M'Vila (Giroud ▶83), Ribery – Benzema
Booked: Mexes

43%	POSSESSION	57%
12	GOAL ATTEMPTS	24
2	CORNERS	8

ENGLAND 1 — UKRAINE 0

Scorer: Rooney 48
Team: Hart – Johnson, Terry, Lescott, Cole – Milner (Walcott ▶70), Gerrard, Parker, Young – Rooney (Oxlade-Chamberlain ▶87) – Welbeck (Carroll ▶82)
Booked: Gerrard, Cole

Team: Pyatov – Husiev, Khacheridi, Rakytskyi, Selin – Yarmolenko, Tymoshchuk, Konoplyanka – Devych (Shevchenko ▶70), Harmash (Nazarenko ▶78), Milevskyi (Butko ▶77)
Booked: Tymoshchuk, Rakytskyi, Shevchenko

42%	POSSESSION	58%
9	GOAL ATTEMPTS	16
6	CORNERS	10

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CZECH REPUBLIC V PORTUGAL

Ronaldo seizes the moment

Portugal's captain answers the critics by leading his team into the last four

Simply unstoppable...Ronaldo (left) brushes off the attentions of Portugal defender Gebre Selassie

JUNE 21 – WARSAW

CZECH REPUBLIC 0
PORTUGAL 1
HT: 0-0. Att: 55,590. Ref: Webb (Eng)

One man, and one man alone, steered Portugal into the semi-finals of Euro 2012. Cristiano Ronaldo continued his personal campaign for international success by scoring the only goal of a game that for 79 minutes had been defined by Portugal's inability to score.

Ronaldo's goal helped overcome the perennial problem of Portuguese football: namely an enduring inability to produce a world-class centre-forward.

In Nani and Joao Moutinho, Portugal have creative options, but Ronaldo remains the focal point of all their attacking work. His charisma and ego – witnessed by his half-time hairstyle change – may not be to everybody's tastes, but you ignore him at your peril.

It was clear from the start that the Czechs would defend deep and the onus would be on Portugal to break them down. "We reinforced our defence as we knew they would attack," said Czech coach Michal Bilek afterwards.

Started on the left but drifted into the middle, behind centre-forward Helder Postiga, Ronaldo kept shifting position across the front line in a bid to unsettle the Czech defence. He had an overhead kick that lacked power and precision, and then fizzed a 40-yard free-kick past the post without troubling goalkeeper Petr Cech.

The Czechs were coping well with Portuguese possession and had an outlet themselves in right-back Theodor Gebre Selassie, whose run and cross threatened to set up Milan Baros before Pepe made a crucial interception.

Postiga limped off with a hamstring injury before half-time and was replaced by Hugo Almeida, but still it was Ronaldo who Portugal looked to. On the stroke of half-time, he produced an outrageous piece of skill that deserved a goal. Chesting down Fabio Coentrao's cross, he turned and beat a Czech defender with the same touch, before hitting a post with a fierce low shot

The warning shot from Ronaldo was a sign of things to come in the second half, as the Czechs defended deeper and Portugal edged closer to the breakthrough.

Not that Almeida was ever going to be their goalscorer. Shortly after the restart, Raul Meireles clipped in a cross to the near post but Almeida misdirected his header wide of the target. Then when Nani's shot was parried by Cech, Almeida put the rebound in the net, but had strayed offside.

Ronaldo hit a post for a second time with a long range free-kick and then skewed a shot over under pressure from Gebre Selassie.

Portugal's midfield also tried their luck from range. Joao Moutinho, on the edge of the area, lashed in a drive that Cech tipped over, while Meireles, having been teed-up by Ronaldo, blasted over.

Holding out

Having converted 20 out of 20 penalty kicks in three shoot-outs (1976, 1980 and 1996) over the years, the Czech Republic were holding out for a fourth and they were 10 minutes away from extra time when Ronaldo shattered their defensive shell.

Moutinho burst down the right and delivered a promising cross. Ronaldo had switched position again, dropping back to the left flank, and his run took Gebre Selassie by surprise at the far post as he stooped to head past Cech.

"Two-and-a-half years ago when I took charge, if someone had told me we'd be in the quarter-finals, after everything that happened in qualifying, I wouldn't have believed them," said beaten boss Bilek.

"I'm really happy we got so far especially after making such a hash of our first game."

But the Czechs had been beaten by a one-man team.

Gavin Hamilton

BAROS QUITS NATIONAL SIDE

All over...Baros retires

Czech striker Milan Baros, who was the top scorer at Euro 2004, announced his international retirement after the match.

Czech Republic right-back Theodor Gebre Selassie left Slovan Liberec for Bundesliga side Werder Bremen on a four-year deal at the end of the tournament.

MAN OF THE MATCH
Cristiano Ronaldo (Portugal)

"We really prepared hard to cope with [Ronaldo] but he is a player of the greatest class. He was able to rise to the occasion."
Czech coach Michal Bilek

MATCH DETAILS

CZECH REPUBLIC 0		PORTUGAL 1
Team: Cech – Gebre Selassie, Sivok, Kadlec, Limbersky – Hubschman (Pekhart ▶86), Plasil – Jiracek, Darida (Rezek ▶61), Pilar – Baros **Booked:** Limbersky		**Scorer:** Ronaldo 79 **Team:** Patricio – Pereira, Pepe, Alves, Coentrao – Meireles (Rolando ▶88), Veloso, Moutinho – Nani (Custodio ▶84), Postiga (Almeida ▶40), Ronaldo **Booked:** Nani, Veloso
44%	POSSESSION	56%
2	GOAL ATTEMPTS	20
6	CORNERS	11

Low's bold changes pay off against limited Greeks

Germany's revamped strikeforce help fire them to the semi-finals

Back in front...Khedira (left) is congratulated by Schurrle after restoring Germany's lead

JUNE 22 – GDANSK

GERMANY 4
GREECE 2
HT: 1-0. Att: 38,751. Ref: Skomina (Sln)

Germany qualified for their fourth straight semi-final at a major tournament in a thoroughly one-sided affair that also underlined the Midas touch of coach Joachim Low and his capacity for brave, audacious and ultimately vindicated calls.

When, on the afternoon of the big game in Gdansk, word leaked out of the German camp that Low was planning to radically restructure his entire front line – benching Thomas Muller, Lukas Podolski and in-form scorer Mario Gomez in favour of Marco Reus, Andre Schurrle and veteran Miroslav Klose – many queried the timing of such an extensive revamp. But how wrong they were as Germany stylishly dominated the valiant but limited Greeks.

"My feeling was that I had to change something," Low declared ambiguously in his post-match press conference. "After three wins in the first phase I wanted to bring some fresh wind to the team."

Low was not arrogantly writing off unfancied Greece or seeking to rotate his personnel. His only issue was finding an antidote to the Greeks' ultra-defensive approach – and decided an injection of subtlety and unpredictable movement was needed. He successfully rang the changes, Klose and Reus both scoring and combining excellently, while Schurrle was always a threat when cutting inside from the left.

Low's gameplan was to force Greece out of their foxholes by hitting them hard and early, and their "shock and awe" tactics were apparent. Klose had a goal ruled out for offside after Greece keeper Michalis Sifakis spilled a Sami Khedira drive, Reus then suffered an unfortunate bobble just as he was about to pull the trigger and Mesut Ozil could only direct a tame side-foot straight at Sifakis.

The keeper then pushed away a shot from Reus, who also fired wildly when well placed and, following another brilliant Ozil slalom, Khedira had a fierce effort blocked by Sifakis. No wonder Low cut an increasingly agitated figure on the sidelines.

But six minutes from the interval, Germany at long last made the breakthrough and fittingly it was the work of skipper Philipp Lahm, who, in his signature move, cut in from the left to unleash a powerful swerving missile past Sifakis.

Invitation to counter

Greece had offered little threat in the first half, but within minutes of the restart conjured up an incredible equaliser. Schurrle's loose pass was their invitation to counter and after some neat one-touch interchanges, Dimitris Salpigidis raced down the right before crossing for Giorgos Samaras to force the ball home.

If Greece had retained parity for longer, Germany might have grown nervous. As it was, though, they were soon back in front, Khedira arriving late in the box to volley in Jerome Boateng's cross. They eventually killed off the game when Klose headed in after Sifakis failed to collect an Ozil free-kick, and then Reus lashed home when the keeper blocked another Klose effort.

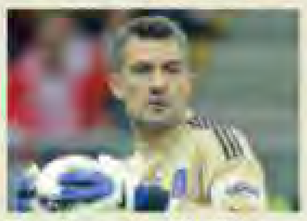
To their credit, Greece kept on battling and in the final minute Salpigidis coolly converted a penalty after Boateng handled.

"Greece are a curious team," said Low. "They make something out of nothing." Germany, on the other hand, make a lot from a great deal.

Nick Bidwell

WORLD RECORD FOR GERMANY

Germany's win gave them a world record 15th consecutive competitive victory. Spain won 19 competitive games in succession between 2007 and 2009 but that run included a penalty shoot-out triumph – which is technically a draw.



Bowing out...Chalkias

After the game, Greece goalkeeper Kostas Chalkias – at 38 the oldest player at Euro 2012 – and striker Nikos Liberopoulos announced their retirement from international football.

MAN OF THE MATCH
Mesut Ozil (Germany)

"Today was the time to bring in some fresh faces and different types of players who could do a job – and I think it worked very well"
Germany coach Joachim Low

MATCH DETAILS

GERMANY 4		GREECE 2
Scorers: Lahm 39, Khedira 61, Klose 68, Reus 74		**Scorers**: Samaras 55, Salpigidis 89pen
Team: Neuer – Boateng, Hummels, Badstuber, Lahm – Khedira, Schweinsteiger – Reus (Gotze ▶80), Ozil, Schurrle (Muller ▶67) – Klose (Gomez 80)		**Team:** Sifakis – Torosidis, Papastathopoulos, K Papadopoulos, Tzavellas (Fotakis ▶46) – Ninis (Gekas ▶46), Makos (Liberopoulos ▶72), Katsouranis, Maniatis, Samaras – Salpigidis
		Booked: Samaras ■, Papastathopoulos ■
66%	POSSESSION	34%
24	GOAL ATTEMPTS	9
10	CORNERS	1

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SPAIN v FRANCE

Spain through as France implode

Alonso marks 100th cap with double but Nasri spat adds to Blanc woe

Perfect timing...Alonso leaves France keeper Lloris helpless as he heads Spain in front

JUNE 23 – DONETSK

SPAIN 2
FRANCE 0
HT: 1-0. Att: 47,000. Ref: Rizzoli (Ita)

France scurried off home with all the old scars reopening after yet another dressing-room squabble was followed by a foul-mouthed exchange between Samir Nasri and a journalist in the wake of defeat by Spain.

French federation president Noel Le Graet, while criticising the midfielder for immaturity, was not free of responsibility himself. His refusal to renew Laurent Blanc's expiring contract before the finals had undermined, if not removed, the coach's authority.

Blanc had seemingly succeeded in pulling the team back together after the 2010 rebellion at the World Cup in South Africa and steering them not only to the Euro 2012 finals but to the last eight.

Yet his oddly unbalanced squad selection – short on strikers and central defenders – was not at the root of Le Graet's reluctance to extend his deal to the 2014 World Cup. The FFF is still haunted by the memory of 2002 when it renewed Roger Lemerre's contract before the World Cup defence in Japan and Korea. Sacking him after a first-round exit proved hugely costly and controversial.

Blanc's lack of control of his players was revealed when Nasri made a "shut your mouth" gesture to the media after scoring against England. More problems erupted immediately after the defeat by Sweden and angry words were exchanged by a number of players in the dressing room which, by Blanc's admission, took most of the next 24 hours to dispel.

That meant the loss of valuable preparation time ahead of the Spain game which was decided by two goals from Xabi Alonso – one early, one very late – to mark his 100th international.

Blanc had conceded the initiative the previous day, admitting France would have to allow Spain to command possession. To that end he brought in Anthony Reveillere as an extra right-back to assist Mathieu Debuchy in closing down Andres Iniesta. Spain coach Vicente Del Bosque reverted to playing without a recognised striker – and his plan worked better than that of Blanc.

"This Spanish side are great. We shouldn't have any shame saying they're a better side than us"
France coach Laurent Blanc

Containment plan

After 19 minutes, Xavi fed Iniesta who sent Jordi Alba down the left flank. As Debuchy slipped, Alba had time and space to deliver a far-post cross which was headed down and home by Alonso. With their containment plan in tatters, France had no option but to surge forward and risk being hit on the counter.

Spain defended at the cost of a string of free-kicks, with Karim Benzema blasting one into the crowd and Yohan Cabaye forcing a save from Iker Casillas with another.

France showed more determination in the second half but threatened only once, when Debuchy headed over a Franck Ribery cross. Spain continued to go round and round in circles of possession until even Del Bosque grew tired of the pretty patterns and sent on Pedro and Fernando Torres. Blanc introduced Jeremy Menez, Nasri and Olivier Giroud to no avail, and when Pedro was pulled down in the final minute, Alonso sent Hugo Lloris the wrong way from the spot.

While Le Graet condemned Nasri's behaviour as "intolerable" and French sports minister Valerie Fourneyron hoped "the team will understand now that enough is enough", Spain cruised on to an Iberian derby date with Portugal.

Keir Radnedge

A FIRST FOR SPAIN

- This was the first time Spain had beaten France in a competitive game.
- Spain's win equalled the European Championship record of 10 consecutive games unbeaten in the finals.
- Iker Casillas – and Spain – kept their eighth consecutive clean sheet in the knockout stage of a major international tournament.
- After 23 runs without defeat, France have now lost twice on the spin.
- After France's exit, striker Olivier Giroud confirmed he was leaving Ligue 1 champions Montpellier for Arsenal.

Clean sheet...Casillas

MATCH DETAILS

SPAIN 2 — FRANCE 0

Scorers: Alonso 19, 90+1 pen

Team: Casillas – Arbeloa, Pique, Ramos, Alba – Alonso, Xavi, Busquets – Silva (Pedro ▶65), Fabregas (Torres ▶67), Iniesta (Cazorla ▶ 84)
Booked: Ramos

Team: Lloris – Reveillere, Rami, Koscielny, Clichy – M'Vila (Giroud ▶79) – Debuchy (Menez ▶64), Cabaye, Malouda (Nasri ▶65), Ribery – Benzema
Booked: Cabaye, Menez

55%	POSSESSION	45%
9	GOAL ATTEMPTS	4
7	CORNERS	3

MAN OF THE MATCH
Xabi Alonso (Spain)

Storemags.com

Tired England outwitted

Hodgson's side go out on penalties once again after failing to cope with Pirlo

Master class...England struggle to stop Pirlo from dictating play

JUNE 24 – KIEV

ENGLAND 0
ITALY 0 aet
Italy won 4-2 on penalties.
HT: 0-0. Att: 64,340. Ref: Proenca (Por)

Some English traditions never fade. At major tournaments, England muddle through their group, briefly raising expectations, then go out to the first quality team they face. On penalties.

And so it was in Kiev. This time it was different, in one crucial sense: there was not the feverish expectations of previous tournaments. Instead, there was a general acceptance that new manager Roy Hodgson had made the best of a poor lot.

Hampered by injuries and restricted by suspensions, Hodgson made England hard to beat, as Italy discovered over 120 minutes at the Olympic stadium. But in the crucial moments of the penalty shoot-out, the qualities of discipline and toughness were not enough to carry England through against technically superior opposition.

Italy did not have a much better record in shoot-outs than England, but in Andrea Pirlo they had a player with the confidence to chip Joe Hart with a Panenka-style penalty – which changed the course of the shoot-out.

The pressure was on Pirlo when he strolled up to take Italy's third penalty. England were 2-1 up in the shoot-out after Riccardo Montolivo had hit the crossbar.

England keeper Hart had taunted the Italians with his reaction to Montolivo's miss, prompting Pirlo's supercool penalty.

"This changed the course of the match," Pirlo admitted. "Hart seemed to be very confident in himself and I needed to do something to beat him."

Pirlo piled the pressure back on England, who failed through Ashley Young, who hit the bar, and Ashley Cole, whose penalty was saved by Gianluigi Buffon.

It was painful for England, but anything other than a victory would have been grossly unfair on Italy. The *Azzurri* had greater possession, more goal attempts and greater composure in the shoot-out.

Yet for the first half hour, England had matched Italy and both teams gave the impression they felt they could win it without the need for penalties.

Good chance

Within minutes of kick-off, Daniele De Rossi's shot crashed off a post, while at the other end Glen Johnson's shot was palmed away by Buffon with a brilliant reflex save. Johnson was enjoying space on the right flank and he dinked in a cross for Wayne Rooney, who headed over. Rooney did not seem to be match-fit after his enforced two-match absence but he combined well with Manchester United team-mate Danny Welbeck. But Welbeck, after benefitting from a Rooney backheel, side-footed a good chance over the bar.

As half-time approached, Italy were starting to exert a considerable influence on the game as England's tendency to defend deep, so evident in the group stages, re-appeared. That had not been a problem against lesser sides, but here Hodgson's men also struggled to retain possession. Maintaining momentum into the second half proved impossible, especially with Scott Parker and Steven Gerrard struggling to keep up with Pirlo in central midfield. The 33-year-old Juventus midfielder found extra space to dictate Italy's control of the game.

In such circumstances, Rooney's lack of fitness and inability to track Pirlo handed the initiative to Italy. De Rossi, Balotelli and Montolivo all went close as England struggled to stay in the game.

Hodgson had few options on the bench and gambled on keeping Rooney on the pitch. Instead, he chose to replace Welbeck with Andy Carroll.

England were now playing aimless long balls to Carroll to flick on in vain to Rooney, while the deep-lying Pirlo was spraying accurate passes to Italian team-mates from his quarter-back position.

Substitute Antonio Nocerino almost snatched a winner in normal time, but Johnson stole the ball from under his feet at the last second.

Nocerino also went closest for Italy in extra time, but his goal from Alessandro Diamanti's cross was ruled offside.

England escaped but there would be no hiding in the penalty shoot-out.

Gavin Hamilton

BANNED

Maggio misses semi-final after being booking against England – his second yellow card of the tournament.

Booked... Maggio

"Penalties are a very personal thing and it seemed to be a psychological blow"
Andrea Pirlo

MATCH DETAILS

ENGLAND 0 — ITALY 0

aet. Italy won 4-2 on penalties.

Team: Hart – Johnson, Terry, Lescott, Cole – Milner (Walcott ▶61), Gerrard, Parker (Henderson ▶94), Young – Rooney – Welbeck (Carroll ▶60).

Team: Buffon – Abate (Maggio ▶90+1), Barzagli, Bonucci, Balzaretti – Pirlo – Marchisio, Montolivo, De Rossi (Nocerino ▶80) – Balotelli, Cassano (Diamanti ▶78).
Booked: Barzagli (82), Maggio (93).

Penalty shoot-out:
(Italy first)
Balotelli 1-0, Gerrard 1-1; Montolivo (missed) 1-1, Rooney 1-2; Pirlo 2-2, Young (hit bar) 2-2; Nocerino 3-2, Cole (saved) 3-2; Diamanti 4-2

36%	POSSESSION	64%
9	GOAL ATTEMPTS	35
3	CORNERS	7

MAN OF THE MATCH
Andrea Pirlo (Italy)

On his own... with his head in his hands, Ronaldo cuts a lonely figure as his Portugal team-mates link arms during the penalty shoot-out

Nervous Spain seal Final spot

Portugal and Ronaldo lose spot-kick strategy battle

JUNE 27 – DONETSK

PORTUGAL 0
SPAIN 0 aet
(Spain won 4-2 on penalties)
HT: 0-0. Att: 48,000. Ref: Cakir (Tur)

Spain equalled West Germany's 1970s achievement of reaching three major Finals in a row with a victory on penalties over Portugal. The triumph may not have been in the style to which they had become accustomed, but Spain were grateful to substitute Cesc Fabregas, who converted the decisive spot-kick and left Portugal to rue their penalty strategy.

Fabregas was able to take advantage after errors by Portugal's Joao Moutinho and Bruno Alves with earlier kicks.

Portugal coach Paulo Bento had opted to deploy Cristiano Ronaldo as his team's fifth penalty-taker. Yet Spain's victory was wrapped up before Ronaldo's services were required, leaving the Real Madrid forward open to accusations that he had refused to take his penalty earlier in the shoot-out in the hope that the fifth penalty would be his chance to be the country's match-winning hero.

Bento said he did not regret electing to put his captain in the fifth slot. "We had this plan," he said. "If it had been 4-4 and he had taken the last penalty we'd be talking in a different way. It's about strategy and we'd planned that before."

Ronaldo cut a lonely, troubled figure in the centre circle, separated from his team-mates who watched proceedings arm in arm. Defeat was a particularly bitter blow for him after he had played such a crucial role in guiding Portugal to the semi-final stage and after such a spectacular season for Spanish champions Real Madrid. Yet, once again, Ronaldo left a major tournament empty-handed. After reaching the Final of Euro 2004, the semi-finals of the 2006 World Cup and the quarter-finals of Euro 2008, his best chance of international success may have passed him by.

"I said to the ball that we had to make history and it shouldn't let me down"
Cesc Fabregas on his penalty technique

Both teams had missed their opening kicks in the shoot-out: Xabi Alonso side-footing wide and Moutinho seeing his kick saved by Iker Casillas. After Andres Iniesta scored his kick, rival centre-backs Gerard Pique and Pepe converted theirs. Sergio Ramos, with echoes of Andrea Pirlo, chipped his shot over Rui Patricio. It was a bold move, made even braver by the knowledge that Ramos had missed in Real Madrid's Champions League semi-final elimination by Bayern Munich a month earlier.

It also piled the pressure on Alves. The Portugal defender had prepared himself to take his team's third kick, only to find

"In the end Spain simply had more luck than we did. But people in Portugal can be proud of their team. We are sad as we deserved to be in the Final, but we can go home with our heads held high"
Portugal's Nani

himself called back while on his way to the penalty area and replaced by Nani, who was number three on Bento's running order. After he had watched Nani and Ramos score, Alves had to make the journey once again. Did that change of strategy from Portugal impair his judgment? His shot clattered the bar and it was left to Fabregas to seal victory for Spain.

"I had a funny feeling about the penalties and I was thinking about them this afternoon," Fabregas said. "That life has given me another chance like this is really incredible."

Winning penalty

It was significant that Fabregas struck the winning penalty. He had been the midfielder to whom Spain coach Vicente Del Bosque had chosen to be his "false no9" in the opening group game against Italy, yet he had been left on the bench as Del Bosque opted for a conventional centre-forward in Alvaro Negredo against Portugal.

The tactical experiment by Del Bosque had to be abandoned after less than an hour as it became clear that Negredo had failed to make an impact. The Portuguese midfield of Raul Meireles and Moutinho pressed and harried Spain high up the pitch, denying them space and forcing them to hit long balls. It meant Xavi was strangely ineffective, buzzing around in search of a role, rather than acting as the fulcrum of the side.

Xavi's 68th-minute shot brought the first save by either keeper – an indication of how chances were at a premium in a match which tested the nerves of all those concerned.

Xavi was substituted in the 87th minute but there was still time for Portugal's best chance of the game. Ronaldo had been starved of possession for most of the 90 minutes but he wriggled free in injury time as Meireles broke on the counter-attack. His pass found Ronaldo in the Spanish area but he blazed his shot over.

In extra time. Spain subs Fabregas, Pedro and Jesus Navas gave their side a greater threat, although chances were still rare. The best fell to Iniesta with only a few minutes remaining. Jordi Alba burst into the area and his cross was met by Iniesta with a volley that Patricio managed to push away.

And that proved to be that. The nerves would be tested one final time with penalties. Ronaldo had been the central figure in the build-up to the match, a magnetic personality who divides opinion on the Iberian peninsula. Yet in the shoot-out, just when he would be expected to play a crucial role, his services were not required.

Gavin Hamilton

TRIBUTES TO MIKI

- **Spain wore black armbands as a tribute to 23-year-old Betis defender Miki Roque, who died the previous weekend after suffering from pelvic cancer.**

Tribute...Spain

- Stadium volunteers in Donetsk were handed free tickets in a bid to cover up poor ticket sales.
- **Cesc Fabregas scored the winner in a Euro penalty shoot-out against Italy four years ago at the quarter-final stage.**

Out of luck...Cristiano Ronaldo (left) sees his free-kick clear the wall but soar over the bar

MAN OF THE MATCH
Sergio Ramos (Spain)

MATCH DETAILS

PORTUGAL 0 — SPAIN 0
aet. Spain won 4-2 on penalties

Team: Patricio – Pereira, Pepe, Alves, Coentrao – Moutinho, Veloso (Custodio ▶106), Meireles (Varela ▶112) – Nani, Almeida (Oliveira ▶81), Ronaldo
Booked: Coentrao ■, Pepe ■, Alves ■, Veloso ■

Team: Casillas – Arbeloa, Pique, Ramos, Alba – Busquets, Xavi (Pedro ▶87), Alonso – Silva (Navas ▶60), Negredo (Fabregas ▶54), Iniesta
Booked: Ramos ■, Busquets ■, Ramos ■, Arbeloa ■

Penalty shoot-out:
(Spain first)
Alonso (saved) 0-0, Moutinho (saved) 0-0; Iniesta 1-0, Pepe 1-1; Pique 2-1, Nani 2-2; Ramos 3-2, Alves (hit bar) 3-2; Fabregas 4-2.

43%	POSSESSION	57%
10	GOAL ATTEMPTS	11
6	CORNERS	7

Leap of faith...Balotelli (in blue) out jumps Badstuber to open the scoring for Italy

Super Mario stuns Germany

Balotelli's blitzkrieg sends favourites crashing out

JUNE 28 – WARSAW

GERMANY 1
ITALY 2
HT: 0-2. Att: 55,540. Ref: Lannoy (Fra)

If ever there was a Germany team who could banish the hoodoo held over the country by Italy it was Joachim Low's young breed of 2012.

The Germans had moved effortlessly through the tournament's earlier games, with midfielders Mesut Ozil and Sami Khedira earning praise for their industry and invention, and with defender Mats Hummels highlighted by many as the defender of the tournament.

They went into the semi-final in Warsaw with high hopes of becoming the first German team to beat Italy in a competitive match.

But Mario Balotelli's two-goal blitzkrieg – a bullet header and a shot of such ferociousness that even Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer applauded – left Low's side dazed and confused. They crashed out of a competition they had such high hopes of winning and the Italian hex remained. Germany have still not scored a goal against Italy in a tournament semi-final.

Balotelli had not had an easy Euros up until this point. Just like his season at Manchester City, he had endured personal vilification only to respond with brilliance on the pitch.

On the morning before the semi-final, he had been the subject of an offensive cartoon in Italy's leading sports paper. Against Germany, he provided the explosive finish for an Italy side that had turned the match-fixing scandal back home to their advantage. Fired by Balotelli's goals, prompted by Andrea Pirlo's superlative passing and steered by coach Cesare Prandelli's thoughtful substitutions, Italy deserved their victory.

MAN OF THE MATCH
Mario Balotelli (Italy)

In the end it was Low who was left to justify his selections. After winning all three group games for the first time at a European Championship, Germany made significant changes to their quarter-final line-up against Greece. Low so again against Italy: Mario Gomez and Lukas Podolski returning, while Toni Kroos was a surprise selection. In the aftermath of defeat, Low was left to defend himself from accusations that he had tinkered unnecessarily.

"That's all part of the development of the team," he said. "You can't get a title by just talking about it.

"In the second-half, we did everything we could to turn the game around. We played with real heart.

"Playing at this top level with these

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teams, there is not much between them. Just one moment can be decisive as to whether you win or lose."

There were signs early on that Low's changes might have the desired effect. For the first 15 minutes, the movement and purpose of Ozil and Khedira threatened to unsettle Italy. Keeper Gianluigi Buffon fumbled Jerome Boateng's cross and was grateful to see it bounce off Andrea Barzagli's legs and away for a corner. But just as it looked as if Khedira and Ozil would impose themselves as the dominant midfield force on the game, Antonio Cassano served up a delicious goal for his strike partner Balotelli.

As with so many of Italy's moves, it began with a sweeping pass from Pirlo. Time and again the Juventus midfielder found space to sweep accurate long passes to his team-mates. On this occasion, Pirlo's pass found Giorgio Chiellini, back from injury but playing out of position at left-back, who fed Cassano on the left hand side of the area. The much-feted Hummels pushed too close to Cassano and the Italian wriggled his way through before chipping a cross to Balotelli, who rose above the static Holger Badstuber to pump home an emphatic header.

"My mother was in the stadium and my father was watching it on television. I scored two goals in front of my mother and I would like to score four in front of my father in Kiev in the Final. My favourite moment was when I embraced my mum after the match"
Mario Balotelli pays tribute to his adoptive mother

Regain the momentum

The goal had gone against the run of play and Germany tried to regain the momentum of the opening minutes. But they were restricted to long-range efforts which did not trouble Buffon. Ozil side-footed his effort wide while Khedira's volley proved a comfortable height for Buffon to push away.

Germany's defence, which had been rattled by Italy's opener, would soon be caught out again. From a Germany corner, Riccardo Montolivo brought the ball out and looked for options as Germany's centre-backs struggled to get back into position.

Montolivo, the son of a German mother and Italian father, spotted Balotelli in the clear as Philipp Lahm stepped up too late. Onside and approaching the edge of the area, Balotelli needed no excuse to unleash a thunderous shot that flew past Neuer.

Low responded with a double substitution at half-time, bringing on Marco Reus and Miroslav Klose for the ineffective Gomez and the anonymous Podolski.

Reus, with a lively run and shot at Buffon with his first touch, looked as if he could spark a Germany fight back. But when he set up Lahm with a cute touch on the edge of the area, the Germany captain fired over the bar.

Reus did go close with a free-kick that dipped over the Italy wall, but Buffon once again proved immense, tipping the ball onto the bar.

Prandelli responded with his own substitutions which served to seal the game for Italy. Alessandro Diamanti replaced the tiring Cassano, while Thiago Motta shored up the midfield in place of the more attack-minded Montolivo.

Prandelli made his final change when Balotelli collapsed in the 70th minute, apparently with cramp. Balotelli had been booked for removing his shirt when celebrating his brilliant second goal and Prandelli feared the second yellow that would rule Balotelli out of the Final.

It was just the excuse Prandelli needed to withdraw his two-goal hero and bring on Antonio Di Natale to stretch the German defence.

With Germany chasing the game, they inevitably left themselves open to the counter-attack.

Claudio Marchisio should have scored when he was played through by Diamanti but sliced his shot wide, and he then chose to shoot when a pass to Di Natale would have teed up the substitute for a tap-in.

Germany's attacks were taking on an increasingly desperate tone. Buffon got down well to save a deflected shot from Hummels and Kroos skied a volley over.

When Federico Balzaretti was harshly adjudged to have handled in the area, Ozil slotted away the penalty but the Germany fans, who had kept up a wall of noise, had gone quiet; they knew it was too late.

Germany pressed on in vain, with Neuer playing as an emergency sweeper on the halfway line.

As his team-mates celebrated on the final whistle, Balotelli stood calmly by the dug-out, plotting his next move.

Gavin Hamilton

EIGHT UNBEATEN

Germany have still to beat Italy in a competitive fixture after eight meetings.

Defeat ended a run of 15 consecutive competitive victories for Germany.

Out...Mesut Ozil

Unstoppable...Lahm (right) can not stop Balotelli from powering home Italy's second goal

MATCH DETAILS

GERMANY 1	ITALY 2
Scorer: Ozil 90+2pen	**Scorers:** Balotelli 20, 36
Team: Neuer – Boateng (Muller ▶71), Hummels, Badstuber, Lahm – Khedira, Schweinsteiger – Kroos, Ozil, Podolski (Reus ▶46) – Gomez (Klose ▶46)	**Team:** Buffon – Balzaretti, Barzagli, Bonucci, Chiellini – Pirlo – De Rossi, Montolivo (Motta ▶64), Marchiso – Cassano (Diamanti ▶58), Balotelli (Di Natale ▶70)
Booked: Hummels	**Booked:** Bonucci, Balotelli, De Rossi, Motta

54%	POSSESSION	46%
8	GOAL ATTEMPTS	5
14	CORNERS	0

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* all ages correct as of 08.06.12

CROATIA

GOALKEEPERS			
12	Ivan KELAVA	(24) 20.02.88	Dinamo Zagreb
1	Stipe PLETIKOSA	(33) 08.01.79	Rostov (Rus)
23	Danijel SUBASIC	(27) 27.10.84	Monaco (Fra)
DEFENDERS			
4	Jurica BULJAT	(25) 12.09.86	Maccabi Haifa (Isr)
5	Vedran CORLUKA	(26) 05.02.86	Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
6	Danijel PRANJIC	(30) 02.12.81	Bayern Munich (Ger)
13	Gordon SCHILDENFELD	(27) 18.03.85	Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
3	Josip SIMUNIC	(34) 18.02.78	Dinamo Zagreb
2	Ivan STRINIC	(24) 17.07.87	Dnipro (Ukr)
21	Domagoj VIDA	(23) 29.04.89	Dinamo Zagreb
MIDFIELDERS			
14	Milan BADELJ	(23) 25.02.89	Dinamo Zagreb
16	Tomislav DUJMOVIC	(31) 26.02.81	Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
19	Niko KRANJCAR	(27) 13.08.84	Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
10	Luka MODRIC	(26) 09.09.85	Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
20	Ivan PERISIC	(23) 02.02.89	Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
7	Ivan RAKITIC	(24) 10.03.88	Sevilla (Spa)
11	Darijo SRNA	(30) 01.05.82	Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
15	Sime VRSALJKO	(20) 10.01.92	Dinamo Zagreb
8	Ognjen VUKOJEVIC	(28) 20.12.83	Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
FORWARDS			
22	EDUARDO	(29) 25.02.83	Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
9	Nikica JELAVIC	(26) 27.08.85	Everton (Eng)
18	Nikola KALINIC	(24) 05.01.88	Dnipro (Ukr)
17	Mario MANDZUKIC	(26) 21.05.86	Wolfsburg (Ger)
COACH			
Slaven BILIC		(43) 11.09.68	

CZECH REPUBLIC

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Petr CECH	(30) 20.05.82	Chelsea (Eng)
23	Jaroslav DROBNY	(32) 18.10.79	Hamburg (Ger)
16	Jan LASTUVKA	(29) 07.07.82	Dnipro (Ukr)
DEFENDERS			
2	Theodor GEBRE SELASSIE	(25) 24.12.86	Slovan Liberec
5	Roman HUBNIK	(28) 06.06.84	Hertha Berlin (Ger)
3	Michal KADLEC	(27) 13.12.84	Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
8	David LIMBERSKY	(28) 06.10.83	Viktoria Plzen
12	Frantisek RAJTORAL	(26) 12.03.86	Viktoria Plzen
6	Tomas SIVOK	(28) 15.09.83	Besiktas (Tur)
4	Marek SUCHY	(24) 29.03.88	Spartak Moscow (Rus)
MIDFIELDERS			
22	Vladimir DARIDA	(21) 08.08.90	Viktoria Plzen
17	Tomas HUBSCHMAN	(30) 04.09.81	Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
19	Petr JIRACEK	(26) 02.03.86	Wolfsburg (Ger)
18	Daniel KOLAR	(26) 27.10.85	Viktoria Plzen
11	Milan PETRZELA	(28) 19.06.83	Viktoria Plzen
14	Vaclav PILAR	(23) 13.10.88	Wolfsburg (Ger)
13	Jaroslav PLASIL	(30) 05.01.82	Bordeaux (Fra)
9	Jan REZEK	(30) 05.05.82	Anorthosis (Cyp)
10	Tomas ROSICKY	(31) 04.10.80	Arsenal (Eng)
FORWARDS			
15	Milan BAROS	(30) 28.10.81	Galatasaray (Tur)
21	David LAFATA	(30) 18.09.81	Jablonec
7	Tomas NECID	(22) 13.08.89	CSKA Moscow (Rus)
20	Tomas PEKHART	(23) 26.05.89	Nuremberg (Ger)
COACH			
Michal BILEK		(47) 13.04.65	

DENMARK

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Stephan ANDERSEN	(30) 26.11.81	Evian (Fra)
16	Anders LINDEGAARD	(28) 13.04.84	Manchester United (Eng)
22	Kasper SCHMEICHEL	(25) 05.11.86	Leicester City (Eng)
DEFENDERS			
4	Daniel AGGER	(27) 12.12.84	Liverpool (Eng)
12	Andreas BJELLAND	(23) 11.07.88	Nordsjaelland
6	Lars JACOBSEN	(32) 20.09.79	Copenhagen
3	Simon KJAER	(23) 26.03.89	Wolfsburg (Ger)
13	Jores OKORE	(19)11.08.92	Nordsjaelland
5	Simon POULSEN	(27) 07.10.84	AZ (Hol)
18	Daniel WASS	(23) 31.05.89	Benfica (Por)
MIDFIELDERS			
8	Christian ERIKSEN	(20) 14.02.92	Ajax (Hol)
20	Thomas KAHLENBERG	(29) 20.03.83	Wolfsburg (Ger)
7	William KVIST	(27) 24.02.85	Stuttgart (Ger)
2	Christian POULSEN	(32) 28.02.80	Evian (Fra)
19	Jakob POULSEN	(28) 07.07.83	Midtjylland
14	Lasse SCHONE	(26) 27.05.86	NEC (Hol)
15	Michael SILBERBAUER	(30) 07.07.81	Young Boys (Swi)
21	Niki ZIMLING	(27) 19.04.85	Club Brugge (Blg)
FORWARDS			
11	Nicklas BENDTNER	(24) 16.01.88	Arsenal (Eng)
9	Michael KROHN-DEHLI	(29) 06.06.83	Brondby
23	Tobias MIKKELSEN	(25) 18.09.86	Nordsjaelland
17	Nicklas PEDERSEN	(24) 10.10.87	Groningen (Hol)
10	Dennis ROMMEDAHL	(33) 22.07.78	Brondby
COACH			
Morten OLSEN		(62) 14.08.49	

ENGLAND

GOALKEEPERS			
23	Jack BUTLAND	(19) 10.03.93	Birmingham City
13	Robert GREEN	(32) 18.01.80	West Ham United
1	Joe HART	(25) 19.04.87	Manchester City
DEFENDERS			
12	Leighton BAINES	(27) 11.12.84	Everton
3	Ashley COLE	(31) 20.12.80	Chelsea
18	Phil JAGIELKA	(29) 17.08.82	Everton
2	Glen JOHNSON	(27) 23.08.84	Liverpool
14	Phil JONES	(20) 21.02.92	Manchester United
5	Martin KELLY	(22) 27.04.90	Liverpool
15	Joleon LESCOTT	(29) 16.08.82	Manchester City
6	John TERRY	(31) 07.12.80	Chelsea
MIDFIELDERS			
19	Stewart DOWNING	(27) 22.07.84	Liverpool
4	Steven GERRARD	(32) 30.05.80	Liverpool
8	Jordan HENDERSON	(21) 17.06.90	Liverpool
16	James MILNER	(26) 04.01.86	Manchester City
20	Alex OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN	(18) 15.08.93	Arsenal
17	Scott PARKER	(31) 13.10.80	Tottenham Hotspur
7	Theo WALCOTT	(23) 16.03.89	Arsenal
11	Ashley YOUNG	(26) 09.07.85	Manchester United
FORWARDS			
9	Andy CARROLL	(23) 06.01.89	Liverpool
21	Jermain DEFOE	(29) 07.10.82	Tottenham Hotspur
10	Wayne ROONEY	(26) 24.10.85	Manchester United
22	Danny WELBECK	(21) 26.11.90	Manchester United
MANAGER			
Roy HODGSON		(64) 09.08.47	

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FRANCE

GOALKEEPERS			
23	Cedric CARRASSO	(30) 30.12.81	Bordeaux
1	Hugo LLORIS	(25) 26.12.86	Lyon
16	Steve MANDANDA	(27) 28.03.85	Marseille
DEFENDERS			
22	Gael CLICHY	(26) 26.07.85	Manchester City (Eng)
2	Mathieu DEBUCHY	(26) 28.07.85	Lille
3	Patrice EVRA	(31) 15.05.81	Manchester United (Eng)
21	Laurent KOSCIELNY	(26) 10.09.85	Arsenal (Eng)
5	Philippe MEXES	(30) 30.03.82	Milan (Ita)
4	Adil RAMI	(26) 27.12.85	Valencia (Spa)
13	Anthony REVEILLERE	(32) 10.11.79	Lyon
MIDFIELDERS			
20	Hatem BEN ARFA	(25) 07.03.87	Newcastle United (Eng)
6	Yohan CABAYE	(26) 14.01.86	Newcastle United (Eng)
18	Alou DIARRA	(30) 15.07.81	Marseille
15	Florent MALOUDA	(31) 13.06.80	Chelsea (Eng)
19	Marvin MARTIN	(24) 10.01.88	Sochaux
12	Blaise MATUIDI	(25) 09.04.87	Paris Saint-Germain
14	Jeremy MENEZ	(25) 07.05.87	Paris Saint-Germain
17	Yann M'VILA	(21) 29.06.90	Rennes
11	Samir NASRI	(24) 26.06.87	Manchester City (Eng)
7	Franck RIBERY	(29) 07.04.83	Bayern Munich (Ger)
FORWARDS			
10	Karim BENZEMA	(24) 19.12.87	Real Madrid (Spa)
9	Olivier GIROUD	(25) 30.09.86	Montpellier
8	Mathieu VALBUENA	(27) 28.09.84	Marseille
COACH			
Laurent BLANC		(46) 19.11.65	

GERMANY

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Manuel NEUER	(26) 27.03.86	Bayern Munich
12	Tim WIESE	(30) 17.12.81	Hoffenheim
22	Ron-Robert ZIELER	(23) 12.02.89	Hanover
DEFENDERS			
14	Holger BADSTUBER	(23) 13.03.89	Bayern Munich
20	Jerome BOATENG	(23) 03.09.88	Bayern Munich
4	Benedikt HOWEDES	(24) 29.02.88	Schalke
5	Mats HUMMELS	(23) 16.12.88	Borussia Dortmund
16	Philipp LAHM	(28) 11.11.83	Bayern Munich
17	Per MERTESACKER	(27) 29.09.84	Arsenal (Eng)
3	Marcel SCHMELZER	(24) 22.01.88	Borussia Dortmund
MIDFIELDERS			
15	Lars BENDER	(23) 27.04.89	Bayer Leverkusen
19	Mario GOTZE	(20) 03.06.92	Borussia Dortmund
2	Ilkay GUNDOGAN	(21) 24.10.90	Borussia Dortmund
6	Sami KHEDIRA	(25) 04.04.87	Real Madrid (Spa)
18	Toni KROOS	(22) 04.01.90	Bayern Munich
13	Thomas MULLER	(22) 13.09.89	Bayern Munich
8	Mesut OZIL	(23) 15.10.88	Real Madrid (Spa)
21	Marco REUS	(23) 31.05.89	Borussia Dortmund
9	Andre SCHURRLE	(21) 06.11.90	Bayer Leverkusen
7	Bastian SCHWEINSTEIGER	(27) 01.08.84	Bayern Munich
FORWARDS			
23	Mario GOMEZ	(26) 10.07.85	Bayern Munich
11	Miroslav KLOSE	(33) 09.06.78	Lazio (Ita)
10	Lukas PODOLSKI	(27) 04.06.85	Arsenal (Eng)
COACH			
Joachim LOW		(52) 03.02.60	

GREECE

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Kostas CHALKIAS	(38) 30.05.74	PAOK
13	Michalis SIFAKIS	(27) 09.09.84	Aris
12	Alexandros TZORVAS	(29) 12.08.82	Palermo (Ita)
DEFENDERS			
20	José HOLEBAS	(27) 27.06.84	Olympiakos
4	Stelios MALEZAS	(27) 11.03.85	PAOK
2	Giannis MANIATIS	(25) 12.10.86	Olympiakos
8	Avraam PAPADOPOULOS	(27) 03.12.84	Olympiakos
5	Kyriakos PAPADOPOULOS	(20) 23.02.92	Schalke (Ger)
19	Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS	(23) 09.06.88	Werder Bremen (Ger)
15	Vasilis TOROSIDIS	(26) 10.06.85	Olympiakos
3	Giorgos TZAVELLAS	(24) 26.11.87	Monaco (Fra)
MIDFIELDERS			
23	Giannis FETFATZIDIS	(21) 21.12.90	Olympiakos
22	Kostas FORTOUNIS	(19) 16.10.92	Kaiserslautern (Ger)
16	Giorgos FOTAKIS	(30) 29.10.81	PAOK
10	Giorgos KARAGOUNIS	(35) 06.03.77	Panathinaikos
21	Kostas KATSOURANIS	(32) 21.06.79	Panathinaikos
6	Grigoris MAKOS	(25) 18.01.87	AEK
18	Sotiris NINIS	(22) 03.04.90	Panathinaikos
FORWARDS			
17	Fanis GEKAS	(32) 23.05.80	Samsunspor (Tur)
9	Nikos LIBEROPOULOS	(36) 04.08.75	AEK
11	Kostas MITROGLOU	(24) 12.03.88	Olympiakos
14	Dimitris SALPIGIDIS	(30) 18.08.81	PAOK
7	Giorgos SAMARAS	(27) 21.02.85	Celtic (Sco)
COACH			
Fernando SANTOS (Por)		(57) 10.10.54	

HOLLAND

GOALKEEPERS			
22	Tim KRUL	(24) 03.04.88	Newcastle United (Eng)
1	Maarten STEKELENBURG	(29) 22.09.82	Roma (Ita)
12	Michel VORM	(28) 20.10.83	Swansea City (Wal)
DEFENDERS			
21	Khalid BOULAHROUZ	(30) 28.12.81	Stuttgart (Ger)
5	Wilfred BOUMA	(33) 15.06.78	PSV
3	John HEITINGA	(28) 15.11.83	Everton (Eng)
4	Joris MATHIJSEN	(32) 05.04.80	Malaga (Spa)
2	Gregory VAN DER WIEL	(24) 03.02.88	Ajax
13	Ron VLAAR	(27) 16.02.85	Feyenoord
15	Jetro WILLEMS	(18) 30.03.94	PSV
MIDFIELDERS			
8	Nigel DE JONG	(27) 30.11.84	Manchester City (Eng)
11	Arjen ROBBEN	(28) 23.01.84	Bayern Munich (Ger)
14	Stijn SCHAARS	(28) 11.01.84	Sporting Lisbon (Por)
10	Wesley SNEIJDER	(27) 09.06.84	Internazionale (Ita)
17	Kevin STROOTMAN	(22) 13.02.90	PSV
6	Mark VAN BOMMEL	(35) 22.04.77	PSV
23	Rafael VAN DER VAART	(29) 11.02.83	Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
FORWARDS			
20	Ibrahim AFELLAY	(26) 02.04.86	Barcelona (Spa)
18	Luuk DE JONG	(21) 27.08.90	Twente
9	Klaas-Jan HUNTELAAR	(28) 12.08.83	Schalke (Ger)
7	Dirk KUYT	(31) 22.07.80	Fenerbahce (Tur)
19	Luciano NARSINGH	(21) 13.09.90	Heerenveen
16	Robin VAN PERSIE	(28) 06.08.83	Arsenal (Eng)
COACH			
Bert VAN MARWIJK		(60) 19.05.52	

ITALY

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Gianluigi BUFFON	(34) 28.01.78	Juventus
14	Morgan DE SANCTIS	(35) 26.03.77	Napoli
12	Salvatore SIRIGU	(25) 12.01.87	Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
DEFENDERS			
7	Ignazio ABATE	(25) 12.11.86	Milan
6	Federico BALZARETTI	(30) 06.12.81	Palermo
15	Andrea BARZAGLI	(31) 08.05.81	Juventus
19	Leonardo BONUCCI	(25) 01.05.87	Juventus
3	Giorgio CHIELLINI	(27) 14.08.84	Juventus
2	Christian MAGGIO	(30) 11.02.82	Napoli
4	Angelo OGBONNA	(24) 23.05.88	Torino
MIDFIELDERS			
16	Daniele DE ROSSI	(28) 24.07.83	Roma
22	Alessandro DIAMANTI	(29) 02.05.83	Bologna
13	Emanuele GIACCHERINI	(27) 05.05.85	Juventus
8	Claudio MARCHISIO	(26) 19.01.86	Juventus
18	Riccardo MONTOLIVO	(27) 18.01.85	Fiorentina
5	Thiago MOTTA	(29) 28.08.82	Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
23	Antonio NOCERINO	(27) 09.04.85	Milan
21	Andrea PIRLO	(33) 19.05.79	Juventus
FORWARDS			
9	Mario BALOTELLI	(21) 12.08.90	Manchester City (Eng)
17	Fabio BORINI	(21) 29.03.91	Roma
10	Antonio CASSANO	(29) 12.07.82	Milan
11	Antonio DI NATALE	(34) 13.10.77	Udinese
20	Sebastian GIOVINCO	(25) 26.01.87	Parma
COACH			
Cesare PRANDELLI		(54) 19.08.57	

POLAND

GOALKEEPERS			
12	Grzegorz SANDOMIERSKI	(22) 05.09.89	Genk (Blg)
1	Wojciech SZCZESNY	(22) 18.04.90	Arsenal (Eng)
22	Przemyslaw TYTON	(25) 04.01.87	PSV (Hol)
DEFENDERS			
2	Sebastian BOENISCH	(25) 01.02.87	Werder Bremen (Ger)
4	Marcin KAMINSKI	(20) 15.01.92	Lech Poznan
15	Damien PERQUIS	(28) 10.04.84	Sochaux (Fra)
20	Lukasz PISZCZEK	(27) 03.06.85	Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
13	Marcin WASILEWSKI	(31) 09.06.80	Anderlecht (Blg)
14	Jakub WAWRZYNIAK	(28) 07.07.83	Legia Warsaw
3	Grzegorz WOJTKOWIAK	(28) 26.01.84	Lech Poznan
MIDFIELDERS			
16	Jakub BLASZCZYKOWSKI	(26) 14.12.85	Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
5	Dariusz DUDKA	(28) 09.12.83	Auxerre (Fra)
21	Kamil GROSICKI	(24) 08.06.88	Sivasspor (Tur)
6	Adam MATUSZCZYK	(23) 14.02.89	Cologne (Ger)
18	Adrian MIERZEJEWSKI	(25) 06.11.86	Trabzonspor (Tur)
11	Rafal MURAWSKI	(30) 09.10.81	Lech Poznan
10	Ludovic OBRANIAK	(27) 10.11.84	Bordeaux (Fra)
7	Eugen POLANSKI	(26) 17.03.86	Mainz (Ger)
8	Maciej RYBUS	(22) 19.08.89	Terek Grozny (Rus)
19	Rafal WOLSKI	(19) 10.11.92	Legia Warsaw
FORWARDS			
23	Pawel BROZEK	(29) 21.04.83	Trabzonspor (Tur)
9	Robert LEWANDOWSKI	(23) 21.08.88	Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
17	Artur SOBIECH	(21) 12.06.90	Hanover (Ger)
COACH			
Franciszek SMUDA		(63) 22.06.48	

PORTUGAL

GOALKEEPERS			
22	BETO	(30) 01.05.82	CFR Cluj (Rom)
1	EDUARDO	(29) 19.09.82	Genoa (Ita)
12	Rui PATRICIO	(24) 15.02.88	Sporting Lisbon
DEFENDERS			
2	Bruno ALVES	(30) 27.11.81	Zenit (Rus)
5	Fabio COENTRAO	(24) 11.03.88	Real Madrid (Spa)
13	Ricardo COSTA	(31) 16.05.81	Valencia (Spa)
19	Miguel LOPES	(25) 19.12.86	Porto
3	PEPE	(29) 26.02.83	Real Madrid (Spa)
21	Joao PEREIRA	(28) 25.02.84	Valencia (Spa)
14	ROLANDO	(26) 31.08.85	Porto
MIDFIELDERS			
6	CUSTODIO	(29) 24.05.83	Braga
16	Raul MEIRELES	(29) 17.03.83	Chelsea (Eng)
15	Ruben MICAEL	(25) 19.08.86	Atletico Madrid (Spa)
8	Joao MOUTINHO	(25) 08.09.86	Porto
17	NANI	(25) 17.11.86	Manchester United (Eng)
10	Ricardo QUARESMA	(28) 26.09.83	Besiktas (Tur)
4	Miguel VELOSO	(26) 11.05.86	Genoa (Ita)
20	Hugo VIANA	(29) 15.01.83	Braga
FORWARDS			
9	Hugo ALMEIDA	(28) 23.05.84	Besiktas (Tur)
11	Nelson OLIVEIRA	(20) 08.08.91	Benfica
23	Helder POSTIGA	(29) 02.08.82	Zaragoza (Spa)
7	Cristiano RONALDO	(27) 05.02.85	Real Madrid (Spa)
18	Silvestre VARELA	(27) 02.02.85	Porto
COACH			
Paulo BENTO		(42) 20.06.69	

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

GOALKEEPERS			
23	David FORDE	(32) 20.12.79	Millwall (Eng)
1	Shay GIVEN	(36) 20.04.76	Aston Villa (Eng)
16	Keiren WESTWOOD	(27) 23.10.84	Sunderland (Eng)
DEFENDERS			
5	Richard DUNNE	(32) 21.09.79	Aston Villa (Eng)
12	Stephen KELLY	(28) 06.09.83	Fulham (Eng)
13	Paul McSHANE	(26) 06.01.86	Hull City (Eng)
18	Darren O'DEA	(25) 04.02.87	Celtic (Sco)
4	John O'SHEA	(31) 30.04.81	Sunderland (Eng)
2	Sean ST LEDGER	(27) 28.12.84	Leicester City (Eng)
3	Stephen WARD	(26) 20.08.85	Wolverhampton W (Eng)
MIDFIELDERS			
8	Keith ANDREWS	(31) 13.09.80	unattached
11	Damien DUFF	(33) 02.03.79	Fulham (Eng)
15	Darron GIBSON	(24) 25.10.87	Everton (Eng)
21	Paul GREEN	(29) 10.04.83	unattached
17	Stephen HUNT	(30) 01.08.81	Wolverhampton W (Eng)
22	James McCLEAN	(23) 22.04.89	Sunderland (Eng)
7	Aiden McGEADY	(26) 04.04.86	Spartak Moscow (Rus)
6	Glenn WHELAN	(28) 13.01.84	Stoke City (Eng)
FORWARDS			
20	Simon COX	(25) 28.04.87	West Bromwich Albion (Eng)
9	Kevin DOYLE	(28) 18.09.83	Wolverhampton W (Eng)
10	Robbie KEANE	(31) 08.07.80	Los Angeles Galaxy (USA)
19	Shane LONG	(25) 22.01.87	West Bromwich Albion (Eng)
14	Jon WALTERS	(28) 20.09.83	Stoke City (Eng)
COACH			
Giovanni TRAPATTONI (Ita)		(73) 17.03.39	

RUSSIA

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Igor AKINFEEV	(26) 08.04.86	CSKA Moscow
16	Vyacheslav MALAFEEV	(33) 04.03.79	Zenit
13	Anton SHUNIN	(25) 27.01.87	Dynamo Moscow
DEFENDERS			
2	Aleksandr ANYUKOV	(29) 28.09.82	Zenit
12	Aleksei BEREZUTSKY	(29) 20.06.82	CSKA Moscow
19	Vladimir GRANAT	(25) 22.05.87	Dynamo Moscow
4	Sergei IGNASHEVICH	(32) 14.07.79	CSKA Moscow
21	Kirill NABABKIN	(25) 08.09.86	CSKA Moscow
3	Roman SHARONOV	(35) 08.09.76	Rubin Kazan
5	Yuri ZHIRKOV	(28) 20.08.83	Anzhi Makhachkala
MIDFIELDERS			
7	Igor DENISOV	(28) 17.05.84	Zenit
17	Alan DZAGOEV	(21) 17.06.90	CSKA Moscow
22	Denis GLUSHAKOV	(25) 27.01.87	Lokomotiv Moscow
9	Marat IZMAILOV	(29) 21.09.82	Sporting Lisbon (Por)
18	Aleksandr KOKORIN	(21) 19.03.91	Dynamo Moscow
15	Dmitri KOMBAROV	(25) 22.01.87	Spartak Moscow
23	Igor SEMSHOV	(34) 06.04.78	Dynamo Moscow
6	Roman SHIROKOV	(30) 06.07.81	Zenit
8	Konstantin ZYRYANOV	(34) 05.10.77	Zenit
FORWARDS			
10	Andrei ARSHAVIN	(31) 29.05.81	Arsenal (Eng)
11	Aleksandr KERZHAKOV	(29) 27.11.82	Zenit
14	Roman PAVLYUCHENKO	(30) 15.12.81	Lokomotiv Moscow
20	Pavel POGREBNYAK	(28) 08.11.83	Fulham (Eng)
COACH			
Dick ADVOCAAT (Hol)		(64) 27.09.47	

SPAIN

GOALKEEPERS			
1	Iker CASILLAS	(31) 20.05.81	Real Madrid
23	Pepe REINA	(29) 31.08.82	Liverpool (Eng)
12	Victor VALDES	(30) 14.01.82	Barcelona
DEFENDERS			
18	Jordi ALBA	(23) 21.03.89	Valencia
2	Raul ALBIOL	(26) 04.09.85	Real Madrid
17	Alvaro ARBELOA	(29) 17.01.83	Real Madrid
5	JUANFRAN	(27) 09.01.85	Atletico Madrid
4	Javi MARTINEZ	(23) 02.09.88	Athletic Bilbao
3	Gerard PIQUE	(25) 02.02.87	Barcelona
15	Sergio RAMOS	(26) 30.03.86	Real Madrid
MIDFIELDERS			
14	Xabi ALONSO	(30) 25.11.81	Real Madrid
16	Sergio BUSQUETS	(23) 16.07.88	Barcelona
20	Santi CAZORLA	(27) 13.12.84	Malaga
10	Cesc FABREGAS	(25) 04.05.87	Barcelona
6	Andres INIESTA	(28) 11.05.84	Barcelona
22	Jesus NAVAS	(26) 21.11.85	Sevilla
21	David SILVA	(26) 08.01.86	Manchester City (Eng)
8	XAVI	(32) 25.01.80	Barcelona
FORWARDS			
19	Fernando LLORENTE	(27) 26.02.85	Athletic Bilbao
13	Juan MATA	(24) 28.04.88	Chelsea (Eng)
11	Alvaro NEGREDO	(26) 20.08.85	Sevilla
7	PEDRO	(24) 28.07.87	Barcelona
9	Fernando TORRES	(28) 20.03.84	Chelsea (Eng)
COACH			
Vicente DEL BOSQUE		(61) 23.12.50	

SWEDEN

GOALKEEPERS			
23	Par HANSSON	(25) 22.06.86	Helsingborg
1	Andreas ISAKSSON	(30) 03.10.81	PSV (Hol)
12	Johan WILAND	(31) 24.01.81	Copenhagen (Den)
DEFENDERS			
15	Mikael ANTONSSON	(31) 31.05.81	Bologna (Ita)
4	Andreas GRANQVIST	(27) 16.04.85	Genoa (Ita)
2	Mikael LUSTIG	(25) 13.12.86	Celtic (Sco)
3	Olof MELLBERG	(34) 03.09.77	Olympiakos (Gre)
13	Jonas OLSSON	(29) 10.03.83	West Bromwich Albion (Eng)
5	Martin OLSSON	(24) 17.05.88	Blackburn Rovers (Eng)
17	Behrang SAFARI	(27) 09.02.85	Anderlecht (Blg)
MIDFIELDERS			
19	Emir BAJRAMI	(24) 07.03.88	Twente (Hol)
6	Rasmus ELM	(24) 17.03.88	AZ (Hol)
18	Samuel HOLMEN	(27) 28.06.84	Istanbul BB (Tur)
9	Kim KALLSTROM	(29) 24.08.82	Lyon (Fra)
7	Sebastian LARSSON	(27) 06.06.85	Sunderland (Eng)
8	Anders SVENSSON	(35) 17.07.76	Elfsborg
16	Pontus WERNBLOOM	(25) 25.06.86	CSKA Moscow (Rus)
21	Christian WILHELMSSON	(32) 08.12.79	Al Hilal (Sau)
FORWARDS			
11	Johan ELMANDER	(31) 27.05.81	Galatasaray (Tur)
14	Tobias HYSEN	(30) 09.03.82	Gothenburg
10	Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC	(30) 03.10.81	Milan (Ita)
22	Markus ROSENBERG	(29) 27.09.82	Werder Bremen (Ger)
20	Ola TOIVONEN	(25) 03.07.86	PSV (Hol)
COACH			
Erik HAMREN		(54) 27.06.57	

UKRAINE

GOALKEEPERS			
23	Oleksandr HORYAINOV	(36) 29.06.75	Metalist Kharkiv
1	Maksym KOVAL	(19) 09.12.92	Dynamo Kiev
12	Andriy PYATOV	(27) 28.06.84	Shakhtar Donetsk
DEFENDERS			
21	Bohdan BUTKO	(21) 13.01.91	Shakhtar Donetsk
3	Yevhen KHACHERIDI	(24) 28.07.87	Dynamo Kiev
5	Oleksandr KUCHER	(29) 22.10.82	Shakhtar Donetsk
17	Taras MYKHALYK	(28) 28.10.83	Dynamo Kiev
20	Yaroslav RAKYTSKYI	(22) 03.08.89	Shakhtar Donetsk
2	Yevhen SELIN	(24) 09.05.88	Vorskla Poltava
13	Vyacheslav SHEVCHUK	(33) 13.05.79	Shakhtar Donetsk
MIDFIELDERS			
8	Oleksandr ALIYEV	(27) 03.02.85	Dynamo Kiev
6	Denys HARMASH	(22) 19.04.90	Dynamo Kiev
9	Oleg HUSIEV	(29) 25.04.83	Dynamo Kiev
19	Yevhen KONOPLYANKA	(22) 29.09.89	Dnipro
18	Serhiy NAZARENKO	(32) 16.02.80	Tavriya Simferopol
14	Ruslan ROTAN	(30) 29.10.81	Dnipro
4	Anatoliy TYMOSHCHUK	(33) 30.03.79	Bayern Munich (Ger)
FORWARDS			
22	Marko DEVYCH	(28) 27.10.83	Shakhtar Donetsk
15	Artem MILEVSKYI	(27) 12.01.85	Dynamo Kiev
16	Yevhen SELEZNYOV	(26) 20.07.85	Shakhtar Donetsk
7	Andriy SHEVCHENKO	(35) 29.09.76	Dynamo Kiev
10	Andriy VORONIN	(32) 21.07.79	Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
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COACH			
Oleg BLOKHIN		(59) 05.11.52	

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All roads lead to Wembley

The Olympic football tournament is a curious hybrid of a competition, says Gavin Hamilton

The re-built Wembley Stadium, which formed the centrepiece of England's doomed 2018 World Cup bid, will be the central venue for the 2012 Olympics football tournament.

Wembley will host the Final of the 16-team competition, as well as one of the semi-finals, a quarter-final and three group games.

Although the wider Games is centred on London and the new Olympic stadium in the east of the city, the football tournament will not be a capital-centric event, with matches being staged in Cardiff (Millennium Stadium), Glasgow (Hampden Park), Manchester (Old Trafford), Newcastle (St James' Park) and Coventry (City of Coventry Stadium).

The fact that the tournament is being taken around the country is another example of how football has always had an uneasy, slightly detached relationship with the Olympics.

Indeed, football has had a long and chequered history with the Games that dates back to before the World Cup. The Olympics, in fact, was a major factor in the first World Cup being launched in Uruguay in 1930 (see Steve Menary, overleaf).

Different interpretations over the use of amateur players led to post-war dominance of the competition by Eastern Bloc countries, but rule changes in the 1980s have created the competition that we have arrived at today: an under-23 tournament, with squads allowed to field three over-age players.

It is an unusual hybrid of a competition, but FIFA finds itself in a compromised position as it wants to have football in the Olympics and enjoy the benefits of IOC membership. At the same time, it does not want the Olympics to become a rival to the World Cup.

In March this year, FIFA ruled that

Imposing host...Wembley Stadium is set to stage six matches, including the Olympic Final, but low spectator interest to date could make for an eerie atmosphere

Varied...matches will be held in Scotland, at Hampden Park (top), and the Millennium Stadium in Wales

all players under 23 must be released by their clubs for the tournament. However for over-age players, the decision is only voluntary.

Lionel Messi famously insisted that Barcelona release him to take part in Argentina's successful defence of their title in 2008. This time around there will most likely be clashes with leading European clubs, many of whom will be in the middle of lucrative pre-season tours of Asia and North America when the Olympics begin.

Special privileges

Another source of tension is the very existence of the Great Britain team. The Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish football associations have been reluctant to throw their weight behind the GB team because of concerns that such a stance would endanger the special privileges enjoyed as individual "home nations" within FIFA.

Currently, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland enjoy individual votes on the game's decision-making body, the IFAB, and a vice-presidency of FIFA which is rotated around the four countries (and is currently held by Northern Ireland's Jim Boyce).

The Scottish Football Association, the Football Association of Wales and the Irish Football Association have consistently opposed plans for a men's British team, but all have said that Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish players who choose to take part will not face punishment or risk exclusion from their national squads. However, SFA chief executive Stewart Regan has warned that players who do accept a call from GB manager Stuart Pearce may face a backlash from fans.

FIFA has been quick to reassure the home nations that a GB team will not affect future relations.

"It's very clear," said FIFA president Sepp Blatter. "If they play, there is no sanction from FIFA."

Of more concern to Olympic organisers will be the lack of action on the ticket front. A month before the tournament kicked off, 1.2million tickets were unsold, with women's matches proving particularly hard to shift. WS

Big moment...the draw is completed at Wembley

TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

Thursday, July 26

GROUP A

United Arab Emirates v Uruguay (17.00, Manchester)
Great Britain v Senegal (19.45, Manchester)

GROUP B

Mexico v South Korea (14.30, Newcastle)
Gabon v Switzerland (17.15, Newcastle)

GROUP C

Belarus v New Zealand (19.45, Coventry)
Brazil v Egypt (19.45, Cardiff)

GROUP D

Spain v Japan (12.00, Glasgow)
Honduras v Morocco (14.45, Glasgow)

Sunday, July 29

GROUP A

Senegal v Uruguay (17.00, London)
Great Britain v United Arab Emirates (19.45, London)

GROUP B

Mexico v Gabon (14.30, Coventry)
South Korea v Switzerland (17.15, Coventry)

GROUP C

Brazil v Belarus (12.00, Manchester)
Egypt v New Zealand (14.45, Manchester)

GROUP D

Spain v Honduras (17.00, Newcastle)
Japan v Morocco (19.45, Newcastle)

Wednesday, August 1

GROUP A

Senegal v United Arab Emirates (19.45, Coventry)
Great Britain v Uruguay (19.45, Cardiff)

GROUP B

Mexico v Switzerland (17.00, Cardiff)
South Korea v Gabon (17.00, London)

GROUP C

Brazil v New Zealand (14.30, Newcastle)
Egypt v Belarus (14.30, Glasgow)

GROUP D

Japan v Honduras (17.00, Coventry)
Spain v Morocco (17.00, Manchester)

Saturday, August 4

Quarter-final (12.00, Manchester)
Quarter-final (14.30, London)
Quarter-final (17.00, Newcastle)
Quarter-final (19.30, Cardiff)

Tuesday, August 7

Semi-final (17.00, London)
Semi-final (19.45, Manchester)

Friday, August 10

Third place play-off (19.45, Cardiff)

Saturday, August 11

Final (15.00, London)

* *all times British Summer Time*

The chase for gold

The Olympic football tournament has grown from humble amateur beginnings to become a platform for the stars. Steve Menary reports

Arrivederci...Great Britain's squad leaves for the 1960 Olympic football tournament in Rome

Football was a part of the Olympic Games more than two decades before FIFA organised the first World Cup. After desultory attempts in Paris in 1900 and St Louis four years later, the 1908 London Games included the first modern international football tournament.

All four Home Nations were invited to take part in 1908, but only England – who were the sole British members of FIFA, itself formed just four years earlier – sent a team. But while the English FA would not tolerate payments to amateurs, in other parts of the world players were compensated for missing work to play.

Non-professionals such as centre-forward Vivian Woodward of Tottenham Hotspur and goalkeeper Horace Bailey of Leicester Fosse were good enough to also represent the full international side and, led by the dashing Woodward, England swept to the 1908 Final, where they beat Denmark – who included the outstanding Nils Middelboe – 2-0 to win the gold medal.

FIFA laid down clear rules on amateurism in Sweden four years later and, although the number of entrants rose to 11, England were still too strong for the rest of the field. In their semi-final they even purposely missed what Woodward felt was an unjust penalty in a 4-0 win over Finland. The Final was a re-match for Woodward and Middelboe, with England winning 4-2.

The unprepared, arrogant holders were easily beaten 3-1 by Norway in the first round of the next Games, in Antwerp in 1920, where the 14 competitors included the first non-European side, Egypt. In the Final, Czechoslovakia walked off the pitch late on in the game after disagreeing with English referee John Lewis over the goal that made it 2-0 to Belgium.

Scarone the star

Twenty two countries entered the 1924 tournament in Paris, including the United States and Uruguay – who thrashed Yugoslavia 7-0 in the first round. Featuring the brilliant Hector Scarone, Uruguay beat Switzerland 3-0 to win gold in front of a 41,000 crowd at the Stade Olympique in Colombes, just outside the French capital.

In Amsterdam four years later, another fine South American attacking force emerged in the shape of Argentina, who lost 2-1 to Uruguay in a replayed Final after the first match was drawn 1-1.

Despite the continuing rows over

amateurism and countries who paid players "expenses", the popularity of football at the Olympics made the need for a separate world championship obvious.

As a result, the Olympic tournament suffered when Uruguay staged and won the first World Cup – which was open to all players, amateur and professional, – in 1930. The sport was dropped from the Los Angeles Olympiad in 1932, but reintroduced four years later in Berlin, where Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime needed big attendances to bankroll investment in new facilities.

Having withdrawn from the previous three Olympic football tournaments, the British returned in 1936 with a combined squad of 13 Englishmen, five Scots and two players apiece from Wales and Northern Ireland. The 16-team competition included China, Japan, Egypt and Peru. Germany were surprisingly beaten in the quarter-finals by Norway, prompting Hitler to storm out.

In a thrilling Final, Italy won 2-1 against Austria, who were coached by an Englishman, Jimmy Hogan. Led by Arsenal's Bernard Joy – the last amateur to win a full cap for England – Great Britain were beaten 5-4 in the quarter-finals by Poland.

At London in 1948, a GB side managed by Manchester United's Matt Busby shocked a strong Holland side 4-3. They then beat France 1-0 before losing 3-1 to Yugoslavia in the semi-finals. Although a Sweden team comprising Gunnar Gren, Gunnar Nordahl and Nils Liedholm beat the Yugoslavs 3-1 in the Final, the tournament had signalled the rise of the Communist bloc, where players were nominally amateur with state jobs but played football full-time.

Home heroes...Great Britain's 1908 gold medal-winning side

Balletic...Hungary take on Yugoslavia in 1952 Final

On podium...Yugoslavia (left), Sweden and Denmark in 1948

Goal...Sweden score against Denmark in London 1948 semi-final

History makers...Nigeria 's 1996 winners

Star stage...Brazil's Romario takes on the Soviet Union in Seoul

PAST OLYMPIC MEN'S CHAMPIONS

YEAR	HOST	GOLD
1908	London	GB
1912	Stockholm	GB
1920	Antwerp	Belgium
1924	Paris	Uruguay
1928	Amsterdam	Uruguay
1932	Los Angeles	(no football)
1936	Berlin	Italy
1948	London	Sweden
1952	Helsinki	Hungary
1956	Melbourne	Soviet Union
1960	Rome	Yugoslavia
1964	Tokyo	Hungary
1968	Mexico	Hungary
1972	Munich	Poland
1976	Montreal	East Germany
1980	Moscow	Czechoslovakia
1984	Los Angeles	France
1988	Seoul	Soviet Union
1992	Barcelona	Spain
1996	Atlanta	Nigeria
2000	Sydney	Cameroon
2004	Athens	Argentina
2008	Beijing	Argentina

Magical Magyars

This approach helped to create the "Magical Magyars" of Hungary. A year before shattering England at Wembley in 1953, Hungary took gold in Helsinki, where a GB side under the sway of England manager Walter Winterbottom were humiliated 5-3 by Luxembourg in a preliminary game.

A long trip to Melbourne and political tension in Europe reduced the entries in 1956 to 11 sides, and the Eastern Bloc provided three semi-finalists and the winners in the Soviet Union.

Interest was stronger for Rome, where a combined GB team lost their opening group game 4-3 to a Brazil side featuring Gerson, before forcing a 2-2 draw with an Italy side that included Giovanni Trapattoni and Gianni Rivera. Yugoslavia won gold, beating Denmark 3-1 in the Final. Hungary took gold in 1964, when decolonisation produced a surge in entrants and 62 nations entered the qualifying competition. Four years later, when 81 countries entered the Mexico Olympics, they retained their title.

British efforts petered out in the qualifiers for Munich, which featured unlikely finalists Burma and Sudan, and was won by Poland, who reached the Final again four years later in Montreal only to lose to East Germany.

In 1974, the FA had finally accepted the amateur credo was an anachronism. All footballers in Britain were now simply players, and with no amateurs the Home Nations could not enter. Just 2,200 fans watched GB's last game – a shock 1-0 qualifying win over 1970 World Cup finalists Bulgaria in 1971 – and their withdrawal barely registered.

By the time of the 1980 Games, the Eastern Bloc had won six golds in a row. This did not change in Moscow, which was blighted by a United States-led boycott over the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan.

After Czechoslovakia beat East Germany, FIFA and the International

Olympic Committee laid down new rules, starting with the 1984 competition. Professionals could now play, but not ones from Europe or South America who had played at a World Cup finals. In one of the better tournaments, Canada were surprise quarter-finalists and unfortunate not to beat a Brazil side who lost in the Final to France and were watched by 101,000 fans in the Pasadena Rose Bowl.

After the Soviet Union triumphed in Seoul, FIFA tweaked the rules to create a world under-23 championship. fNow only players of that age could feature, along with three over-age players. At Spain 1992, a host side featuring Pep Guardiola beat Poland 3-2 in front of 95,000 in the Final at Camp Nou.

Nigeria triumph

Four years later, the Nigeria became the first African side to win a major world tournament. After shocking Brazil in the semi-finals, they downed Hernan Crespo's Argentina in the Final. Four years later, a Cameroon side including Samuel Eto'o beat a Spain team featuring Xavi and Carles Puyol to keep the gold in Africa.

In 2004 Carlos Tevez scored eight times for Argentina, who beat Paraguay to the gold medal as South America became the dominant force. Four years later, Lionel Messi insisted that Barcelona release him for the Beijing Olympics, where Argentina retained the title in front of nearly 90,000 fans.

That players of such stature would want to play in the Olympics is inconceivable in Britain – although David Beckham was keen for a last hurrah in London – but across the rest of the globe the world's oldest international football tournament retains its allure. WS

● *Steve Menary is the author of GB United? British Olympic Football and the End of the Amateur Dream*

Beaten...Spain's Puyol (right) in the 2000 Final

Lap of honour...Uruguay take the plaudits after beating Switzerland 3-0 to win the Olympic title in Paris in 1924

Continental shift

Tim Vickery explains why the Olympic football tournament is more important to South American teams than those from Europe

It is fair to say that, historically, South America has not made a huge impact on the Olympics. While it is true Brazil is working hard to broaden its sporting base, of the 20 gold medals the country has won, over half have come in the last four Games.

Argentina has picked up 17 golds, but its glory days are long gone. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Peron government invested heavily in a wide range of sports and leading athletes were closely identified with the regime, but all that ended when Peron was deposed in 1955. Since then, Argentina has claimed just four gold medals – two of them in the last two football tournaments.

The rest of the continent combined has won just eight golds, while Bolivia has never won a medal of any kind. The only time Paraguay has been on the podium was for the silver it won in the football tournament in 2004, and Uruguay's two golds were both for football, in 1924 and 1928.

This, then, is a convincing explanation for the importance attached in South America to the Olympic football tournament; after all, it is the activity in which it does best and therefore cares about most. However, there are other reasons.

One is to be found in South American football's sense of the grandeur of its own history. The introduction of the Copa America in 1916, and its staging almost annually in the early years, gave a huge impulse to the development of the game in the continent. Uruguay arrived in Paris as unknowns for the 1924 Games, but not only did they sweep all comers aside on the way to the gold they also introduced Europe to an artistic, balletic style of play that set off a fever for the game.

South American prominence was confirmed four years later when Uruguay retained their title by beating Argentina 2-1, after a replay, in the Final of the Amsterdam Games.

These twin triumphs suggested that football had outgrown the Olympics and there was a need for a tournament where professionals could compete with amateurs to find out who was the best.

And thus the World Cup was born, first staged (and won) by Uruguay in 1930. Hurriedly built for the occasion, Montevideo's Estadio Centenario pays homage to the heroes of 1924 and 1928 with the stands behind the goals named Colombes and Amsterdam after the venues of the two victories.

Gold...Lionel Messi (left) and Sergio Aguero triumph in Beijing

The main stand is the Tribuna Olimpica and, even today, if a player scores directly from a corner it is called an "Olympic goal" – a reference to Argentina's winner when they beat Uruguay 2-1 in Buenos Aires shortly after *La Celeste* had won gold in 1924.

So Olympic football is part of the continent's folklore. But it is not just about the past. For South American teams, the Olympic tournament is also an important aid in building for the future.

Fast-tracked

When the major European nations select senior international squads the overwhelming criteria used is performances at club level. In South America it is more complicated as many of a country's players will be dotted around Europe or perhaps Mexico. More weight, therefore, is given to performances with the national team at junior level, and those who do well playing for their nation's under-20 side are frequently fast-tracked straight into the senior squad.

The two countries that qualify for the Olympics have a chance to extend that process. With three over-age players to provide guidance, coaches can get an under-23 squad together and work with them tactically, while observing their performances under pressure. Some of the players might already be in the senior squad so they can consolidate their position and prepare for a role of leadership. Others will play themselves into contention, while some may play themselves out of it.

One thing is certain. When the full history is written about the campaigns of Brazil and Uruguay in the 2014 World Cup, what happens this summer in England will surely be part of the narrative. WS

Facetoface

MANO MENEZES

"It would be quite hypocritical of me not to be the Olympic team manager"

Brazil's national coach is under pressure to win Olympic gold this summer as well as the World Cup on home soil in 2014

You took charge of Brazil in July 2010. How do you assess your performance so far?
I have to be quite careful talking about this because I am certainly not unhappy with what the team has shown so far, given the circumstances. It is easy to simply look at the results – in particular the defeats we suffered to Argentina, France and Germany – and overlook the fact that we have had a major overhaul of the national team since the last World Cup. We have basically changed the vast majority of the team who went to South Africa and there was no way we would escape paying the price. We have brought in a whole load of young and inexperienced players who had never played together before, but it was something we had to do to move forward.

Doesn't this reshuffling strategy run the risk of increasing the pressure for a forthcoming World Cup that is already full of expectations?
It certainly has brought more demands and the reshuffle obviously made things harder for us on the pitch, especially against the stronger sides. But we can't refrain from throwing the kids into the tougher missions. That is the only way we will be able to prepare them for what is to come. Always a difficult tournament, the World Cup will bring the added pressure of playing at home – and we can't underestimate that. I believe we are learning a lot without great traumas. The players know they will have to be tested because, in 2014, they can't expect teams to simply roll over.

Why do you think Brazil's senior side has struggled of late?
There is no surprise in this because Brazil is still looking for its identity. We have been trying to return to our traditions of a strong passing game with individual skills. At the same time we are searching for a new mentality. We are getting there, but it is not something that will happen overnight. The team needs more fine-tuning and we have also suffered with injuries to key players. Lucas Leiva, for example, is a very important player for us and his absence will certainly cause trouble. Ganso is crucial for the kind of system we want to play, where a creative midfielder joins the strikers as often as he can. We also have to think about more immediate targets like the Olympics.

Brazil have never won the Olympic tournament and it has proved to be a problematic competition for both the country and its coaches in the past. Should you really have taken the Olympic job too?
First of all, it would be quite hypocritical of me not to be the Olympic team manager. Since I took over I have been going on and on about the importance of the Olympics as a tournament for Brazil, in terms of historical results and as a crucial step for our World Cup plans. Players who are now eligible for London 2012 will form 70 per cent of the 2014 squad. These games will be more important than ever for Brazil. Thus, wouldn't it sound crazy if I simply decided not to take the team there?

But wouldn't losing make your position more complicated?
I am never going to play safe just to keep my job. There are obvious risks and pressures, but you simply can't obsess about getting fired. My job is also about overseeing a generational transition and, above all, to stimulate a change of attitudes on the pitch. For me, this shift is more important than sitting in the dugout in two years time.

Do you worry that you could be sacked if Brazil don't win the gold medal?
I have learned in football not to work with "ifs". I have been trying to get the strongest possible team together for the Olympics and I understand how important this competition has become to Brazilian football. But somebody needs to keep cool at the moment and, as the manager, I need to be the first one to take a deep breath. The pressure has always existed in the national team.

But unlike his predecessor Ricardo Teixeira, the Brazilian Football Confederation president Jose Maria Marin has not only publicly defined the gold medal as a priority but he has also commented on team selection. Has this made life harder for you?
I prefer to see it as style differences. President Teixeira didn't speak his mind publicly and president Marin does. But I do know Marin has good intentions, although people might take him out of context.

How do you view your opponents in the group stage of the Olympics?
The under-20 team played Egypt last year and it was a complicated game [they drew 1-1]. I believe they will have a lot of those players in the Olympics and the fact it will be our first game in the competition makes it trickier. Brazil are always a good scalp to have. Belarus, our second opponents, did a great job at the Under-21 European Championship. We don't have much information about New Zealand but you just can't dismiss opponents. Brazil will have to prove on the pitch they are a better team. ▸

On his critics...

"The fact that we have won 70 per cent of our games and conceded an average of less than a goal per match are signs that I am not doing as badly as some of them say"

What teams do you see as your main rivals in the competition?
Mexico, Great Britain and Spain are, in theory, our main opponents and we somehow hope they do their jobs in qualifying in first place in their groups so we can have very strong semi-finals.

So, can this group of players finally win the gold medal for Brazil?
I trust this group and I believe they are aware of the importance of this tournament. But the Olympics medals are the result of what happens over two weeks; they are a consequence of the moment of a team and we need to be at our best from July 25. That's when we will know how good our chances are. But we have made progress in the last two years and I am confident that we are moving forward.

Would it be fair to say that the current generation are not as blessed with talent as some of those before them?
It might be a bit precipitated to say it now, when this crop of players hasn't been tested in a big tournament, but we have some very exciting names and I really don't believe we should be that pessimistic. We are making progress – and the most important thing for the players to understand is that talent alone won't be enough to make things work.

But would you agree that a lot of people in Brazil and abroad are starting to think this team might not win the World Cup?
As of today, we are not the favourites like Spain and Germany could be considered. But we can arrive in 2014 much closer to them. Let's remember that the World Cup is the portrait of a specific moment lived by a team. Argentina arrived in Japan and South Korea in 2002 after cruising in the qualifiers and ended up going home in the first round.

Does the inclusion of three over-age players in your Olympic squad mean you are not going to rely just on youth in 2014?
Experience is important in football, and extremely valuable when you think of the challenges the group will face in 2014 – something that could overwhelm a younger player. I am not the kind of man who shuts the door for a professional purely for age reasons, so I am observing the over-30 players. If they are in good form by the time 2014 arrives, why should I exclude them?

Does that mean that Kaka could still have a part to play?
There is nothing preventing him from coming back and I even called him up for the Gabon and Egypt games last November. He got injured, though. Let me say that a lot of the criteria we use to cap players is not revealed to the public. We worry about not overexposing athletes, which is why I gave Robinho a break recently after he was getting a lot of stick back in Brazil. People say I protect Ronaldinho, but the only thing I said when I called him up for the first time in 2010, for the Argentina friendly in Doha, is that I would certainly not have him for just one game as it would be disrespectful to an athlete with such a history in the game.

The future...Neymar (left) takes on Argentina's Lionel Messi during June's friendly international in the United States

Intelligent...Luiz will shrug off criticism and move on

Experience...Menezes brought Ronaldinho back into the side

Ronaldinho has had some good moments back in Brazilian football, but he is certainly not the same player who dazzled the world between 2002 and 2006. Is it really feasible that he could play in his third World Cup in two years time?
It's not what Ronaldinho does in a week that will count. He's a player with an importance that cannot only be measured on the pitch; he's got the experience of world football. But, I admit, his fluctuating form is an issue.

Among the young players you have brought into the fold is David Luiz. Were you worried by his erratic form at times for Chelsea last season?
David is a player I had been observing since his Benfica days and I do believe he has got amazing technique and a lot of maturity – which is why I was surprised to see him struggling at Chelsea. It led me to have a private chat with him. I just told him to calm down and stop trying to do everything. He needs to remember he is a defender, and that bombing forward should be an exception for it could expose him against quality opposition – he's the last line of defence. But I believe David was just trying too hard to show his commitment to a club that invested heavily in his services. He's had a lot of stick, but he's an intelligent guy who will shrug it off and move on.

Interview by Fernando Duarte

Storemags

Pearce set to make history

Britain has a team in an Olympic football tournament for the first time in 52 years

GREAT BRITAIN

Despite the Football Associations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales objecting to a Great Britain football team for fear of losing their individual status at future FIFA tournaments, GB manager Stuart Pearce was set to select a cosmopolitan squad made up from all four corners of the United Kingdom.

However, just how many players outside of England and Wales will make his starting line-up is open to question.

Pearce sprung a major surprise a month before the games began when he left former England captain David Beckham out of his final 18-man squad.

Beckham had been involved with the London 2012 programme from when they won the initial bid in Singapore in 2005 right up to receiving the Olympic flame in Athens in May this year. It was expected that he would be a nailed-on certainty for Team GB, but Pearce, who flew to Los Angeles to watch him play for his club, clearly wasn't impressed.

Much credit must go to the GB coach for not bowing to popular opinion. Pearce clearly means business.

With Beckham left out of the squad, attention will now turn to 18 players rather than one individual. The Welsh duo of Gareth Bale and Aaron Ramsey, who both fit the selection criteria, could just be the jewels in the British crown ahead of any Englishman Pearce selects.

If they can win their group then a potential semi-final against Brazil in Manchester is a mouth-watering possibility. Team GB could get a medal, but it may not be gold.

THE COACH

As the man in charge of England under-21s, it looked at one point as though **Stuart Pearce** would have three jobs this summer, having already been appointed Team GB boss and caretaker England manager following the sacking of Fabio Capello. He becomes the first manager of a British Olympic football team since Norman Creek in 1960.

In contention...potential squad members Frazier Campbell of Sunderland (left) and Everton's Jack Rodwell model the Team GB kit

In charge...Pearce will be keen to win

KEY PLAYERS

On the eve of his 21st season at Manchester United, Welshman **Ryan Giggs** will be keen to be part of the set-up and is ready to perform on the global stage for the first time in his illustrious career.

Having been on the fringes of Roy Hodgson's Euro 2012 squad, the 22-year-old Chelsea striker **Daniel Sturridge** should be a regular starter in Pearce's team.

The blistering pace of **Gareth Bale** should get fans off their seats at Old Trafford, Wembley and in his home country's Millennium Stadium for Team GB's group matches. Should be a shoo-in for selection.

Overlooked by Hodgson for Euro 2012 and not rated by previous full-time England boss Fabio Capello, **Micah Richards** will have a point to prove.

Duncan Bond

Pace...Bale should be playing in Wales

The generation Games

Now is the time for Tabarez to integrate his youngsters with the senior side

URUGUAY

Things have gone remarkably well on two fronts since Oscar Tabarez took charge of Uruguay six years ago. The senior side came fourth in the World Cup and won the Copa America, while the junior teams have been strong at under-17 and under-20 level.

Now the Olympic tournament – Uruguay's first participation since the gold medal campaigns of 1924 and 1928 – is the big chance to bring these two strands together.

The senior side is ageing and, in the early rounds of the 2014 World Cup qualifiers, Uruguay have only used two players under the age of 23, and even then only briefly. Some players will have to be replaced – or at least some new options will have to appear – over the next two years, so the London Games give the next generation a chance to step up.

But who will be given the opportunity? There are so many alternatives that earlier this year Tabarez put 72 players, including his entire senior squad, on call as possible over-age players.

In the meantime he has been training in Montevideo with a group of home-based youngsters, many of which are drawn from the impressive under-20 squads of 2011 and 2009. And some of the outstanding members of those sides have already moved abroad and are clamouring for inclusion. It will not be easy to whittle down all the options to a squad of 18.

The future...Uruguay (in white) line up before an Under-20 World Cup group game against Cameroon, in Colombia, in August 2011

Successful...national coach Tabarez

THE COACH

Oscar Tabarez is now 65 and enjoying a hugely successful second spell in charge of the national team. With his clear thinking, tactical knowledge and man management skills, "*El Maestro*", who is a qualified teacher, is the undoubted architect of Uruguay's resurgence.

KEY PLAYERS

Liverpool centre-back **Sebastian Coates** did well during last year's Copa America and is seen as the long-term replacement for senior captain Diego Lugano.

Diego Rodriguez, a central midfielder with Defensor, is viewed as the successor to Diego Perez. He is similarly tigerish, but offers more on the ball.

The tournament is important for left-footed attacking midfielder **Gaston Ramirez**, who has yet to reproduce his Bologna form for the senior side, while jet-heeled striker **Abel Hernandez**, who has been in and around the senior squad since the World Cup, hopes to put an injury-hit season with Palermo behind him.

One of the outstanding players last year in international football, striker **Luis Suarez** is a clear candidate for an over-age slot.

Tim Vickery

Senior service...Ramirez (right) on duty for the national side against Romania in February

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Going through...Senegal celebrate beating Oman 2-0 in the Olympic play-off at the City of Coventry Stadium

SENEGAL

Senegal needed an April play-off in England to secure their place at the Games, but they could turn out to be an underrated force.

By finishing fourth in the inaugural African Under-23 Championship late last year, Senegal went into a one-off play-off match with Oman, which they won fairly comfortably in Coventry.

It will be the first time Senegal have played at the Olympics and their squad is brimming with exciting young talent – many of which have been elevated into the senior side and who played in the start of the 2014 World Cup qualification campaign in June.

Among those being sought to provide extra experience as over-age players are Demba Ba and Papiss Cisse of Newcastle United, although this has only been speculation so far.

THE COACH

Joseph Koto is a former national midfielder who has also been acting as caretaker coach for the senior side since the debacle at the African Nations Cup finals earlier in the year.

KEY PLAYERS

Anderlecht striker **Cheikhou Kouyate** played a part in his club winning last season's Belgian championship, while **Sadio Mane** scored in the recent World Cup qualifiers on his first appearance for the senior side.

Midfielder **Pape Maly Diamanka** made his Spanish league debut this year with Rayo Vallecano, and Osasuna striker **Ibrahima Balde**, who was previously at Atletico Madrid, played as a teenager in Argentina.

Mark Gleeson

Well travelled...striker Balde

Determined...midfielder Rashed Essa (right) takes on Uzbekistan in the Asian qualifiers

UAE

The United Arab Emirates line up at the Olympic football tournament for the first time in their history after sneaking ahead of Uzbekistan to book a spot in London.

Mahdi Ali's team made a slow start to qualifying before notching up four consecutive victories to edge out the Uzbeks, who had looked to be a shoo-in for one of the three Asian berths after an impressive start to the final phase of qualifying.

However, the experience that Ali's young team had gained over the previous two years gave the Emirates the strength of character needed to persevere as they notched up wins over Uzbekistan, Iraq and Australia.

Many of the squad – seen as a golden generation within the Emirates after winning the Asian Under-19 crown in 2008 and reaching the quarter-finals of the Under-20 World Cup a year later – featured in the team that reached the Final of the Asian Games in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou in November 2010, when they lost to Japan.

The core of that team has carried over into the side that qualified for the Olympics, with a number having also graduated to the senior side and featured for their country at the finals of the AFC Asian Cup in Qatar at the start of 2011.

Ali's team conceded just twice in qualifying and his squad will be bolstered by the addition of three over-age players, including former Asian young player of the year Ismail Matar.

THE COACH

The 45-year-old coach and former UAE international – he missed out on an appearance at the 1990 World Cup because of injury – **Mahdi Ali** gave up a job with the Dubai Municipality to devote himself full time to football and he has worked with many within the squad during their passage through the various age categories.

KEY PLAYERS

UAE's only overseas-based professional, central defender **Hamdan Al Kamali** joined Lyon in January, initially on a six-month loan deal. He anchors the defence of the Olympic side.

Arguably the biggest star in Emirates football, **Ismail Matar** won the Golden Ball at the Under-20 World Cup in 2003, when the UAE hosted the competition. A power striker, he is one of three over-age players.

Classy central midfielder **Amer Abdulrahman** dictates the tempo of the team's play from in front of the defence with his accomplished passing and cool temperament, and is seen as a star of the future in the Middle East.

Named the Asian young player of the year in 2008, and runner-up for the same award 12 months later, **Ahmed Khalil** is from a family of footballers and forms an effective partnership in attack with Matar for the national team.

Michael Church

Mexico: Jekyll or Hyde?

Tena's talented squad are working hard to erase past mistakes

MEXICO

Mexico will travel to London with big ambitions. The under-23 team won their place at the Olympic finals by finishing first in the CONCACAF qualifiers, where Luis Fernando Tena's side won all their matches, scoring 16 goals and conceding only three in the process. They then proceeded to win the prestigious under-21 Toulon Tournament in France, demolishing Holland in the semi-finals and Turkey in the Final, adding 14 more goals to their tally, with seven of them scored by Marco Fabian.

It is no surprise, then, to discover there are lofty expectations for the team to win the nation's first Olympic football medal. Fabian himself said in a recent interview: "Why can't we dream of the gold? We have a great generation of players and we are peaking just at the right moment.

"The time has come for us to show what we are worth."

He is indeed right that this team seems to be peaking at the right time. Before the qualifiers started there was widespread pessimism from the Mexican media and fans about the team's chances. It was, after all, the same players who were suspended for six months after sneaking prostitutes in during the run-up to the 2011 Copa America and that went on to lose their three matches in the tournament, failing to score a single goal.

London next...Mexico celebrate victory in the Toulon Tournament earlier this summer

The measure of how things have changed is that everybody now expects Mexico to easily go through the group stage and are already confident about a possible quarter-final clash against either Great Britain or Uruguay.

If the team play to their potential they can go all the way, but there have been so many ups and downs in the process that it's impossible to know exactly which Mexican team will feature in the Olympics: the Dr Jekyll of 2012 or the Mr Hyde of 2011.

One to watch...Herrera was named the best player of the Toulon Tournament

THE COACH

Luis Fernando Tena, a competent club coach who won domestic titles in 1997 and 2000, was going through a dry spell when he was appointed national under-23 coach. Heavily criticised in the wake of the Copa America fiasco, he remained in his job only because of the unconditional support of senior national boss Jose Manuel de la Torre. After changing his usual defensive focus and giving the players more attacking freedom, he was repaid with a fantastic string of performances this year.

KEY PLAYERS

Giovani Dos Santos hasn't impressed at Tottenham Hotspur but he has been superb for the national team. The main star of his generation, he will spearhead the Olympic team and hope that a good tournament will convince Spurs' new manager that Harry Redknapp had him completely wrong.

Marco Fabian – who has been nicknamed "Marquito" (little Marco) due to immature behaviour that has betrayed his immense talent – has come into his own after being suspended for six months following the prostitutes episode at the Copa America. A powerful and technical playmaker, he has a knack for spectacular goals.

Carlos Salcido will be one of the squad's over-age reinforcements. The former Fulham left-back will skipper the team and play a key role in a defence that seems to be the side's weakest link. He can cover every position across the back line and even act as a midfield anchorman.

Hector Herrera was named player of the Toulon Tournament and he has developed into a fast, box-to-box midfielder who is reported to have caught the attention of Liverpool and Manchester United.

Martin del Palacio Langer

Storemags.com

Final clincher...Poko

GABON

The surprise winners of the first African Under-23 Championship in Morocco at the end of last year gave the form book a severe working over as they emerged from the ranks of likely also-rans to grab a place in the Games finals.

Gabon's main focus had been on preparing the senior side for their hosting of the African Nations Cup, but the under-23s stole the spotlight from them.

This will be the first time the country has competed in the Olympic football tournament and their presence will more than double the number of the nation's competitors in London.

Coach Claude Albert Mbourounot is likely to be assisted at the Games by the new national senior coach Paulo Duarte and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, who is the central African country's star player and is set to be one of their over-age choices.

The Saint-Etienne striker was both hero and villain at the African Nations Cup and has a chance for redemption after his penalty shoot-out miss cost Gabon a semi-final spot.

Gabon's side will be drawn mainly from home-based clubs, but there are also players from France and Spain.

THE COACH

Claude Albert Mbourounot is the technical director of the Gabon federation and was an he was an assistant at this year's African Nations Cup.

KEY PLAYERS

In midfield, **Andre Poko** of Bordeaux scored the goal that put Gabon in the finals, while **Cedric Boussoughou** was captain of the side that won last year's African Under-23 Championship.

Remy Ebanega is a defender who played at the African Nations Cup finals as a replacement centre-back, while **Alexander N'doumbou** – a junior at Marseille who has a Chinese mother – has already been capped at senior level.

Mark Gleeson

SOUTH KOREA

Lacking a squad with any great depth of experience in the top leagues of Europe, the Koreans could scarcely have chosen more fortuitous group opponents than Gabon, Mexico and Switzerland.

But the team's potential downfall could be that they have highlighted that fact with a hint of overconfidence in their estimation of Mexico and Switzerland in particular.

On the other hand, the side do have some extra motivation to achieve a place on the Olympic podium: any Korean male who wins an Olympic medal automatically forgoes the country's mandatory two-year military service.

THE COACH

Hong Myung-bo represents a footballing institution in South Korea, having played at four consecutive World Cups as well as at the Olympics. As a coach, he led the under-20s to the 2009 World Cup quarter-finals and the Asian Games semi-finals in his present role with the under-23s.

KEY PLAYERS

Ji Dong-won had an indifferent season in the Premier League with Sunderland, but could be a key part of the Korean attack, which is traditionally the weakest area of the country's national sides at all levels.

After a 15-game loan spell in which he bagged five goals at Augsburg in the Bundesliga, Wolfsburg attacking midfielder **Koo Ja-cheol** will carry the creative weight of South Korea during the tournament.

Jeju United centre-back **Hong Jeong-ho** will captain the side and could be crucial to a solid defensive platform. Much is also expected of winger **Kim Bo-kyung**, who has been heralded as the next Park Ji-sung. He has impressed with Cerezo Osaka in Japan over the last couple of years and has a keen eye for goal.

Bryan Kay

Point to prove...Ji is eager to shake of his indifferent season with Sunderland

SWITZERLAND

Working a passage to London by virtue of their runners-up spot at last year's European Under-21 Championship in Denmark, Switzerland will be keen to make an impression this summer.

Not only do they intend to underline the good health of the country's footballing grassroots, they also have a lot of Olympic catching up to do – not having taken part in the Games since Amsterdam in 1928, four years after they clinched silver at the Paris Olympiad. Coach Pierluigi Tami describes a first-round group which pits his charges against Gabon, South Korea and Mexico as "not easy at all" and his task is likely to be made all the more difficult because of selection problems.

Domestic champions Basle, who must pre-qualify for the Champions League at around the same time, are unwilling to let any of their potential Olympians – goalkeeper Yann Sommer and midfielders Fabian Frei and Valentin Stocker – go, while Bayern Munich may well prevent the participation of their new signing, ex-Basle forward Xherdan Shaqiri.

For his three overage men, Tami looks keen on established international goalkeeper Diego Benaglio, stopper Philippe Senderos and wing-back Valon Behrami.

THE COACH

Pierluigi Tami is a 50-year-old from the Italian-speaking province of Ticino who was voted the country's coach of the year in 2011 for his great work with the under-21s.

KEY PLAYERS

Twenty-year-old Dynamo Kiev striker **Admir Mehmedi**, who scored his first full international goal in a 5-3 friendly win over Germany recently, could be one to watch, as is **Jonathan Rossini**, a highly rated central defender who has been on the books of Serie A Sampdoria since the age of 16.

Of the more established overage players, **Valon Behrami** of Fiorentina can play either on the right-side of midfield or at full-back, while **Diego Benaglio** was a Bundesliga winner with Wolfsburg three years ago.

Nick Bidwell

Striking starlet...Mehmedi

Win or bust for Menezes

The Brazil coach is under pressure to deliver the "missing" title

BRAZIL

With Olympic gold the only title they have yet to win, Brazil aim to complete the set in London. There have been several frustrated attempts over the last 25 years and the general assumption is that another one will cost coach Mano Menezes his job.

The tournament, therefore, is something of a referendum on Menezes and his two-year tenure, with its aim of renewing the side, in terms of both personnel and ideas, and its ultimate target of winning the next World Cup.

The importance of the Olympics is enhanced by the fact that, as 2014 hosts, Brazil have no World Cup qualifiers to help whip their side into shape. Not being involved in the qualification process has allowed them to concentrate on the Olympic tournament and play a number of warm-up friendlies.

Centre-back Thiago Silva seems sure to be one of the over-age players, with another alongside him – either David Luiz or Dede. The third could be goalkeeper Jefferson, striker Hulk or highly talented but dangerously explosive left-back Marcelo.

But the real focus will fall on a generation of promising home-based youngsters, spearheaded by Neymar. If all goes well for the 20-year-old, this side will serve as a sketch of the 2014 team – a real treat for British crowds.

Line dance...Neymar (second right) celebrates with his team-mates after scoring in a friendly against the United States

THE COACH

Mano Menezes took over the national team soon after the last World Cup and is yet another Brazil boss from the more European south of the country. He made his name with Gremio and Corinthians, and frequently points out that the rhythm of the international game is more intense than that of Brazilian football.

KEY PLAYERS

Thiago Silva is quick and classy, one of the best centre-backs around. The Milan man will captain the side and organise the defence.

Sandro, battle-hardened by two seasons at Tottenham Hotspur, will be strong, mobile and reliable in central midfield. **Oscar** is a talented attacking midfielder who was the hero of last year's World Youth Cup and looks to have pipped Paulo Henrique Ganso to the No10 shirt.

Santos wonderkid **Neymar** is one of the most eagerly anticipated performers at the tournament, but he has yet to turn on the magic against the compact defences of international football. **Leandro Damiao** is a target man. Strong and developing in technical terms, he has an interesting understanding with Internacional club-mate Oscar.

Tim Vickery

Threat...Damiao battles past Mexico's Severo Meza (left) and Francisco Rodriguez

Great expectations...Menezes

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BELARUS

Having drawn up a preliminary list of 35 players, coach Georgi Kondratiev shocked many in Belarus by leaving out one of the country's best-known players of the past decade: Alexander Hleb.

"I will rely on the young players that gained the right to play at Olympics," explained Kondratiev. "They are very well motivated and thirsty for success."

Unfortunately recent performances have not been too positive and at the Toulon tournament in France Belarus drew 0-0 with Morocco, and lost 3-1 to France and 2-1 to Mexico.

"I'm not disappointed because we were not too bad," continues Kondratiev. "We are concentrated to qualify from our group in London."

The bulk of the team will be composed from the undisputed leaders of Belarus football, BATE.

THE COACH

Recently appointed coach of the senior side, **Georgi Kondratiev** led the under-21s to third place at the 2011 European Championship in Denmark. He made his name as a forward with Dinamo Minsk and won the USSR title in 1982. He was voted the best Belarusian coach in 2011.

Towering...Baha

KEY PLAYERS

Goalkeeper **Alyaksandr Hutar** is one of the best of his generation, while energetic midfielder **Dzmitry Baha** is a good passer and towering central defender **Egor Filipenko** has improved after failing to make an impact with Spartak Moscow.

Renan Bressan is of Brazilian origin and was top scorer in the Belarus Supreme league in 2010.

Stepping up...El Shennawey has won senior caps

He could be joined by 28-year-old striker **Vitali Rodionov**, who has 28 senior caps and six goals.

Oleg Zadernovsky

EGYPT

Having been the first Africans at the men's football tournament, in Antwerp in 1920, Egypt have been frequent visitors to the Olympic Games, qualifying for the finals 13 times – although this summer will be their first appearance in 20 years. They have never won a medal but did finish fourth in Tokyo in 1964.

Qualification for London became a major priority after the senior side's disastrous failure to reach the African Nations Cup finals earlier this year in order to defend their continental title.

Hany Ramzy, one of the greats of Egyptian football, took charge of that campaign and the side's unexpected collapse in qualifying gave him a chance to use his Under-23 side in the last two group games late last year – academic outings that offered considerable experience for the youngsters.

At the African Under-23 Championship, Egypt won their group to qualify before losing to Morocco in the semi-finals, but beat Senegal in the bronze-medal match to make sure of their progress to the Olympic finals.

THE COACH

As a centre-back for the national team, **Hany Ramzy** played at the 1990 World Cup and enjoyed a long career in the Bundesliga before returning home to embark on a coaching career.

KEY PLAYERS

Twenty-year-old striker **Mohamed Salah** scored the winner in June's World Cup qualifier against Guinea and has just joined Swiss club Basle from Arab Contractors. His former team-mate **Bassem Ali** has also been capped at senior level but could be included.

Zamalek keeper **Ahmed El Shennawey** is another with international caps, as is full-back **Ahmed Hegazy** who joined Fiorentina from Ismaili in January.

Mark Gleeson

NEW ZEALAND

The Kiwis' task is a simple one: to right the ship. Up until June, New Zealand football had every reason to feel good about itself following several sterling performances at FIFA tournaments – then came a humbling OFC Nations Cup defeat by minnows New Caledonia.

The quaintly named "Oly Whites" now urgently need solid results in England to regain credibility for the game back home.

On paper, they possess a side capable of achieving them, although Winston Reid's unavailability is a significant handicap. Had the West Ham United defender been present, New Zealand could have fielded pretty much a preferred senior team line-up, with the Reid, Tommy Smith and Ryan Nelsen back-three combination from the 2010 World Cup intact.

Neither Nelsen nor Reid appeared when Honduras were beaten 1-0 in a recent friendly in Dallas, but 10 other Olympians did feature, so the Egyptian and Belarusian games can be contemplated with some optimism.

Brazil, of course, are entirely different. The South Americans inflicted a 5-0 drubbing at the Beijing Olympics and a more respectable scoreline at Newcastle United's St James' Park will be among New Zealand's prime goals.

The extent of their realistic aspirations is qualification for the quarter-finals. And that would certainly constitute the desired two steps forward.

THE COACH

Ex-Wolverhampton Wanderers utility man **Neil Emblen** has won two domestic league titles during his four-year coaching career.

KEY PLAYERS

The defence's linchpin, **Ryan Nelsen** was an inspirational captain in South Africa 2010 and it is essential that he repeats the feat. Meanwhile, shaky performances at the OFC Nations Cup have raised questions about the capabilities of first-choice keeper **Jake Gleeson**.

Of Chilean extraction, **Marco Rojas** is the most exciting young talent produced by Kiwi football in three decades. **Shane Smeltz**, a striker whose quality has been established at club and senior international levels, is the most likely source of goals.

Paul Moon

Source of goals...Smeltz

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Continuity is the key

Triumphant under-21 squad of 2011 will form Olympic side

SPAIN

Spain's Olympic squad will be made up entirely of players who won the last European Under-21 Championship, played in Denmark in 2011. The team that triumphed over Switzerland in the Final included the likes of Juan Mata, Javi Martinez, Iker Muniain and Thiago Alcantara – all of whom have since progressed to the senior Spain side, although Thiago missed Euro 2012 through injury and may not be ready in time for the Olympics.

Such is Spain's strength in depth that the only over-age players who coach Luis Milla will include in his 18-man squad will be those who featured in the under-21 triumph, such as Mata, who is now 24.

Milla has coached this generation of players from under -19 level through to the current under-23 side that will compete in London. In addition to those players who have stepped up to the senior side, the Olympic squad is likely to include talents such as Barcelona winger Cristian Tello, Chelsea midfielder Oriol Romeu and Ander Herrera of Athletic Bilbao.

Spain have a proud record in Olympic football. They won the gold medal at the 1992 Games in Barcelona, where Kiko's 90th-minute goal sealed a 3-2 victory over Poland in the Final. In 2000, a side featuring Xavi and Carles Puyol lost to Cameroon in the Final. They will be much fancied to come through a group containing Honduras, Japan and Morocco, and from there, the gold medal is a realistic ambition.

Stepping up...Spain captain Martinez tussles with Switzerland's Xherdan Shaqiri during the 2011 Euro Under-21 Championship Final

Club sandwich...Bilbao team-mates Munian (left) and Herrera help shut out Belarus

THE COACH

A former Spain midfielder (three caps) who played for Barcelona and Real Madrid, **Luis Milla** began his coaching career as an assistant at Getafe before joining the Spanish federation and working his way through the age groups.

KEY PLAYERS

Chelsea midfielder **Juan Mata** is keen to play in London, although at the age of 24 he will need the permission of his club, while Manchester United keeper **David De Gea** won the European Under-21 title in 2011 and is already an experienced campaigner.

Midfielder **Ander Herrera** scored the opening goal in the European Under-21 Final against Switzerland last summer and was one of the stars of Athletic Bilbao's run to the 2012 Europa League Final. He is likely to be included, along with club-mate **Iker Muniain.**

Striker **Adrian** was one of the stars of the Atletico Madrid team which beat Bilbao in the Europa League Final last season and recently made his senior Spain debut.

John Holmesdale

Age-group experience...Milla

Senior international...Sakai

JAPAN

This is a good generation for Japan and quite a few of the squad are already, or will soon be, playing top-level football in Europe, including Takashi Usami (at Bayern Munich last year, now Hoffenheim), Hiroshi Kiyotake (Nuremberg), Hiroki Sakai (just transferred to Hanover), Yuki Otsu (Borussia Monchengladbach) and Ryo Miyaichi (Arsenal and Bolton Wanderers). Maya Yoshida (VVV Venlo in Holland) is already a fixture in Alberto Zaccheroni's national-team back line.

The most lauded player of this generation, Shinji Kagawa, did not feature in the provisional list following his transfer to Manchester United but even without him this is a squad with several players clearly in the picture for Brazil in 2014.

Coach Takashi Sekizuka mostly had to make do with Japan-based players during the Asian qualifiers and at the preparatory Toulon tournament he was missing several likely members who were on World Cup qualifying duty, so there will be a lot of interest to see how the team comes together in London, their fifth consecutive Olympic football tournament.

Bronze medallists in Mexico in 1968, Japan's best performance to date in the under-23 Olympic era was a quarter-final place in 2000. There is no reason why they should not aim as high again.

THE COACH

Takashi Sekizuka made his mark in transforming Kawasaki Frontale from a division two team into one of the powerhouses of J.League football with a high-pressure, counter-attacking game.

KEY PLAYERS

Maya Yoshida is an imposing figure in the back line, excellent with his feet as well as in the air with fine positioning sense. He is already a regular with the senior side.

Full-back **Hiroki Sakai** was a major factor in Kashiwa Reysol's J.League championship last year. He loves to power down the right and crosses superbly. Newly inducted to the national team.

Hiroshi Kiyotake is now following in Shinji Kagawa's footsteps from Cerezo Osaka to Germany and offers many of the same qualities as a lively attacking midfielder with an instinct for goal.

Creative attacking midfielder **Takashi Usami** was on the Bayern Munich bench at this year's Champions League Final. He debuted in the Asian Champions League at 17, has grown fast and will be keen to be noticed in London.

Mike Plastow

High profile...Figueroa (in white)

HONDURAS

Honduras have taken part in three of the last four Olympics – which is a surprise because they usually have to fight against regional giants Mexico and United States for one of CONCACAF's two berths. This time, they qualified after narrowly beating an El Salvador side who had already ousted the Americans.

Doubts exist over whether they can make an impression in London or, as is more likely, they will repeat their whipping-boys performance of Beijing in 2008, where they lost all three matches and failed to score a single goal.

Although they lack flair, the Hondurans are a very physical side. While that could be an asset in the CONCACAF qualifiers, it's definitely a handicap against the sort of well-prepared sides that they are likely to face this summer.

THE COACH

Luis Fernando Suarez is a respected Colombian coach whose main achievement was to take Ecuador to the second round of the World Cup in 2006 and who doubles up as coach of the senior international team. A motivator rather than a refined tactician.

KEY PLAYERS

Maynor Figueroa plays as a centre-back for the senior team and will be one of the over-23 reinforcements for the Olympics. Fast and powerful, he's the highest-profile player of the team.

Emilio Izaguirre is another of the over-23 reinforcements, his presence was still in doubt as Celtic will need him for the Champions League qualifiers.

Andy Najar was named MLS Rookie of the Season in 2010. The 19 year-old winger will be a threat to opposing left backs.

Diminutive striker **Roger Rojas** has excellent movement and is a strong finisher. Probably the squad's most talented under-23 player.

Martin del Palacio Langer

MOROCCO

Morocco dipped heavily into the Diaspora to put together a side to qualify for the Olympics, but they also benefited from the unrest in Egypt last year. The security situation in Cairo meant the African Under-23 Championship was moved to Morocco, which they turned to their advantage.

They suffered a surprise defeat in the Final to Gabon but by then had already made sure of their place at the London Games.

Pim Verbeek left his job as Australia coach after the 2010 World Cup to become technical director of the Morocco federation and oversee the Olympic bid. Using his Dutch connections he has packed the squad full of talent from the lowlands, including recently persuading sought-after Omar El Kaddouri to throw in his lot with Morocco after previously playing for Belgium under-21s.

Verbeek has left out Adel Taarabt, whose mercurial temperament and inconsistent performances make him too much of a liability in an 18-man squad.

THE COACH

Pim Verbeek coached Australia at the 2010 World Cup and was also South Korea's assistant under Guus Hiddink and later Dick Advocaat.

KEY PLAYERS

Younes Belhanda was one of the top players in Ligue 1 last season, helping Montpellier to their first French championship.

Abdelhamid El Kaoutari, a former France Under-19 defender, and another Montpellier star.

Zakaria Labyad, a teenage prodigy who was born in Holland and is the subject of a transfer wrangle between PSV Eindhoven and Sporting Lisbon.

Yacine Qasmi is a striker who started at Paris Saint-Germain and Rennes but has not played at a senior level for club or country.

Mark Gleeson

Moroccan promise...Belhanda (right) holds off Edmond Mouele of Gabon

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World Service

The ultimate global news & results section

In control...Corinthians' Alex (front) in action against Santos in the Libertadores Cup semi-final between the two Brazilian sides

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Continental challenge...Tahiti's Nicolas Vallar is tackled by Jacques Haeko of New Caledonia

ARGENTINA

Hat-trick hero

Lionel Messi became the first player since Italy's Paolo Rossi in the 1982 World Cup to score a hat-trick against Brazil.

His three goals secured a 4-3 win for Argentina and mean Messi has scored eight goals in his last four appearances for his country. It also took the Barcelona star's tally for the entire season with club and country to an astonishing 82 goals.

The friendly was played in the MetLife Stadium, New Jersey, in front of a crowd of 81,994. Brazil twice held the lead – at 1-0 and 3-2 – before Napoli's Federico Fernandez equalised for Argentina and Messi secured victory with a solo effort from 21 yards.

Goal...Messi celebrates his third

BELARUS

Barren run goes on

A 1-1 draw at home to Lithuania extended Belarus' winless run to six games. Ramunas Radavicius put the visitors ahead before Stanislav Dragun equalised.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Dzeko best again

Manchester City striker Edin Dzeko is the country's player of the year for the third successive season. Amar Osim, who won the domestic double with Zeljeznicar, was named coach of the year.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

First World Cup win

Two goals from Foxi Kethevoama gave the Central African Republic

Internationals

2014 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

AFRICA SECTION

● 5 finals places available

2nd round

Group A

June 2 - Bangui
Central African Republic 2 (F Kethevoama 18, 57)
Botswana 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Camille (Sey)

June 3 - Rustenburg
South Africa 1 (Mphela 77)
Ethiopia 1 (Said 30)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 13,611. **Ref:** Nampiandraza (Mad)
South Africa: Khune - Ngcongca, Masilela (Masenamela 34), Gould, Khumalo, Khuboni (Modise 73), Pienaar, Letsholonyane (Manyisa 46), Tshabalala, Mphela, Nomvete.

June 9 - Gaborone
Botswana 1 (Nato 38)
South Africa 1 (Gould 15)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 7,500. **Ref:** Keita (Mli)
South Africa: Khune - Ngcongca, Masenamela (Mashaba 61), Gould, Khumalo, Khuboni, Pienaar, Manyisa, Tshabalala (Modise 68), Mphela, Nomvete (Rantie 59).

June 10 - Addis Abeba
Ethiopia 2 (Said 38, 88)
Central African Republic 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 25,000. **Ref:** Raphael (Mwi)

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 2ND ROUND: GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ethiopia	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Cent Af Rep	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
South Africa	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Botswana	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Group B

June 2 - Freetown
Sierra Leone 2 (M Kamara 10, Suma 26)
Cape Verde Islands 1 (Marco Soares 90+4)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 25,000. **Ref:** Agbovi (Gha)

June 2 - Monastir
Tunisia 3 (Jemaa 51, Harbaoui 56, Hammami 88)
Equatorial Guinea 1 (Randy 34)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Abid (Alg)
Tunisia: Mathlouthi - Boussaidi, Chemmam, Ifa, Jemal, Traoui, Saihi (Baratli 89), Ben Yahia (Harbaoui 46), Khelifa, Ben Hatira, Jemaa (Hammami 78).

June 9 - Praia
Cape Verde Islands 1 (Odair Fortes 26)
Tunisia 2 (Khelifa 14, Jemaa 46)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 3,600. **Ref:** Jiyed (Mor)
Tunisia: Mathlouthi - Boussaidi, Chemmam, Hichari, Jemal, Traoui, Hammami, Khelifa, Ben Hatira (Ben Yahia 57), Jemaa, Harbaoui (Bouazzi 73).

June 9 - Malabo
Equatorial Guinea 2 (Juvenal 13, 41)
Sierra Leone 2 (Barlay 23, I Bangura 30)
HT: 2-2. **Att:** 4,000. **Ref:** Cordier (Chd)
Sent off: Kargbo (Sierra Leone) 51min

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 2ND ROUND: GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tunisia	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Sierra Leone	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Eq Guinea	2	0	1	1	3	5	1
Cape Verde Is	2	0	0	2	2	4	0

Group C

June 2 - Bakau
Gambia 1 (Jammeh 16)
Morocco 1 (Kharja 76)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Alioum (Cam)
Morocco: Lamyaghri - Benlamalem, Bergdich, Benatia, El Khaliqi, Hermach, Kharja, Ait-Fana (El Arabi 65), Salhi (Abourazzouk 46), Barrada (Amrabat 46), Belhanda.

June 2 - Abidjan
Ivory Coast 2 (Kalou 18, Drogba 76)
Tanzania 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Jedidi (Tun)
Sent off: Morris (Tanzania) 65min
Ivory Coast: Barry - Eboue, K Toure, Tiene, Gosso, Tiote (Ya Konan 63), Lolo, Coulibaly, Kalou (Gradel 72), Gervinho (Keita 63), Drogba.

June 9 - Marrakech
Morocco 2 (Kharja pen 41, Abourazzouk 89)
Ivory Coast 2 (Kalou 8, K Toure 60)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 36,000. **Ref:** Grisha (Egy)
Morocco: Lamyaghri - Benlamalem, Bergdich, Benatia, El Khaliqi, El Adoua, Kharja, Chtaibi (Amrabat 73), Ait-Fana (Salhi 75), Barrada, El Arabi (Abourazzouk 65).
Ivory Coast: Barry - Lolo, K Toure, Tiene, Gosso, Tiote, Coulibaly, Keita (Ya Konan 46), Kalou, Gervinho (Gradel 60), Drogba (Bony 84).

June 10 - Dar es Salaam
Tanzania 2 (Kapombe 60, Nyoni pen 84)
Gambia 1 (M Ceesay 7)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Ruzive (Zim)

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 2ND ROUND: GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Tanzania	2	1	0	1	2	3	3
Morocco	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Gambia	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

Group D

June 1 - Kumasi
Ghana 7 (Muntari 15, Adiyiah 24, 50, J Ayew 45, 88, Atsu 85, Akaminko 90+2)
Lesotho 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 38,000. **Ref:** Diatta (Sen)
Sent off: Koetle (Lesotho) 90min
Ghana: Kwarasey - Inkoom (Opare 56), Afful, Boye, Akaminko, D Boateng (Annan 62), Agyemang-Badu, Muntari (Atsu 58), K Asamoah, J Ayew, Adiyiah.

June 2 - Khartoum
Sudan 2 (Tahir 49, Ali 72)
Zambia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 18,000. **Ref:** Bangoura (Gui)
Zambia: Mweene - Nkausu, Himoonde, Sunzu, Nyirenda (Chamanga 57), Lungu, Sinkala, Chansa (Njovu 66), C Katongo, Mayuka (F Katongo 82), Kalaba.

June 9 - Ndola
Zambia 1 (C Katongo 15)
Ghana 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 40,000. **Ref:** Kordi (Tun)
Zambia: Mweene - Lungu (Nkausu 90+1), Sunzu, Himoonde, Mbola, F Katongo (Kasonde 81), Chansa, Sinkala, Kalaba, C Katongo, Mayuka (Sakuwaha 67).
Ghana: Kwarasey - Inkoom, Afful, Boye, Vorsah, D Boateng (Annan 65), Agyemang-Badu, Muntari (Mpong 79), K Asamoah (Atsu 55), J Ayew, Adiyiah.

June 10 - Maseru
Lesotho 0
Sudan 0
Att: 4,000. **Ref:** Shikongo (Nam)

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 2ND ROUND: GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sudan	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
Ghana	2	1	0	1	7	1	3
Zambia	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Lesotho	2	0	1	1	0	7	1

Group E

June 2 - Ouagadougou
Burkina Faso 0
Congo 0
Att: 23,904. **Ref:** El Alrach (Mor)

June 3 - Niamey
Niger 0
Gabon 0
Att: 20,000. **Ref:** Haimoudi (Alg)

June 9 - Pointe Noire
Congo 1 (Malonga 86)
Niger 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,500. **Ref:** Munyemana (Rwa)
Sent off: Chikoto (Niger) 41min

June 9 - Libreville
Gabon 1 (Ebanega 56)
Burkina Faso 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 23,000. **Ref:** Fall (Sen)

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 2ND ROUND: GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Congo	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Gabon	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Burkina Faso	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Niger	2	0	1	1	0	1	1

Group F

June 2 - Nairobi
Kenya 0
Malawi 0
Att: 14,000. **Ref:** Otogo-Castane (Gab)

June 3 - Calabar
Nigeria 1 (I Uche 80)
Namibia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Abdel (Sud)
Nigeria: Enyeama - Oboabona, Oshaniwa, Egwuekwe, Ambrose, Nwankwo (H Uche 68), Reuben, I Uche, Moses (K Uche 79), Utaka (Musa 60), Uzoenyi.

June 9 - Blantyre
Malawi 1 (J Banda 90+2)
Nigeria 1 (Reuben 89)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 25,000. **Ref:** Seechurn (Mts)
Nigeria: Enyeama - Oboabona, Oshaniwa, Egwuekwe, Ambrose, Nwankwo (Lawal 75), Reuben, I Uche, Moses (K Uche 67), Utaka (Musa 83), Uzoenyi.

June 9 - Windhoek
Namibia 1 (Botes 85)
Kenya 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 12,000. **Ref:** Bondo (Bot)

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 2ND ROUND: GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Namibia	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Malawi	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Kenya	2	0	1	1	0	1	1

Group G

June 1 - Alexandria
Egypt 2 (Fathallah 54, Zidan 63)
Mozambique 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kirwa (Ken)
Played behind closed doors
Egypt: El Hadary - El Mohammady, Hegazy, Fathallah, Abdelshafy, Abd Rabo (El Taqy 76), El Nenny, M Salah, Aboutraika, Temsah (I Salah 63), Geddo (Zidan 46).

June 3 - Harare
Zimbabwe 0
Guinea 1 (Traore 35)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Seechurn (Mts)

June 10 - Conakry
Guinea 2 (A Camara pen 19, A Bangoura 88)
Egypt 3 (Aboutraika 58, pen 67, M Salah 90+5)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 14,000. **Ref:** Alioum (Cam)
Sent off: N Yattara (Guinea) 63min
Egypt: El Hadary - Fathy, Fathallah, Hegazy, Abdelshafy, El Nenny, Abd Rabo, Shawky (Temsah 40), Aboutraika (Ghaly 85), M Salah, Geddo (Zidan 58).

June 10 - Maputo
Mozambique 0
Zimbabwe 0
Att: 26,000. **Ref:** Kalyango (Uga)

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 2ND ROUND: GROUP G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Guinea	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Zimbabwe	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Mozambique	2	0	1	1	0	2	1

Group H

June 2 - Blida
Algeria 4 (Feghouli 27, Soudani 32, 82, Slimani 79)
Rwanda 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Gassama (Gam)

June 3 - Cotonou
Benin 1 (Omotoyossi 18)
Mali 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Sikazwe (Zam)

June 10 - Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
Mali 2 (N'Diaye 30, M Maiga 80)
Algeria 1 (Slimani 7)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 5,847. **Ref:** Bennett (SAf)

June 10 - Kigali
Rwanda 1 (Bokota pen 88)
Benin 1 (Omotoyossi 74)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Bamlak (Eth)
Sent off: Adenon (Benin) 86min

their first-ever win in a World Cup qualifier as they beat Botswana 2-0. Kethevoama is currently on loan to Astana of Kazakhstan from Hungary's Kecskemti.

ENGLAND

Auld enemy return

As part of the FA's 150th anniversary celebrations, England will play Scotland at Wembley in August 2013. The two countries have not met since November 1999, when Scotland won 1-0 with a goal from Don Hutchison.

GERMANY

Beaten by the Swiss

Having rested their eight-strong Bayern Munich contingent, Germany lost to Switzerland for the first time since 1956. Borussia Monchengladbach keeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen made his international debut as Germany went down 5-3 in a friendly.

Beaten...keeper Ter Stegen

GHANA

Gyan available again

Asamoah Gyan, who announced in February that he was stepping down from international duty, has made himself available for selection by the "Black Stars" once again.

The striker explained that his withdrawal from the national team was necessary because he had been psychologically troubled by the two penalties he missed, at the 2010 World Cup and the 2010 Nations Cup

"I had to take a respite in order to rebuild my morale," said the 26-year-old, who has won 59 caps.

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 2ND ROUND: GROUP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benin	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Algeria	2	1	0	1	5	2	3
Mali	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Rwanda	2	0	1	1	1	5	1

Group I

June 2 - Yaounde
Cameroon 1 (Choupo-Moting pen 58)
DR Congo 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Bennett (SAf)

June 3 - Lome
Togo 1 (Damessi 8)
Libya 1 (Zuway 15)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Coulibaly (Mli)

June 10 - Kinshasa
DR Congo 2 (Mputu 23, Mbokani pen 81)
Togo 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 50,000. **Ref:** Farouk (Egy)
Sent off: Mutamba (DR Congo) 39min

June 10 - Sfax, Tunisia
Libya 2 (Zuway 8, Ahniash 90+3)
Cameroon 1 (Choupo-Moting 16)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Maeruf (Eri)

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 2ND ROUND: GROUP I	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libya	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
DR Congo	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Cameroon	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Togo	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Group J

June 2 - Dakar
Senegal 3 (Balde 32, N'Doye 72, S Mane 83)
Liberia 1 (Doe 2)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Doue (IvC)
Sent off: Grimes (Liberia) 60min

June 3 - Luanda
Angola 1 (Djalma 8)
Uganda 1 (Okwi 87)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 48,000. **Ref:** Grisha (Egy)

June 9 - Kampala
Uganda 1 (Walusimbi pen 85)
Senegal 1 (P D Cisse 37)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Benouza (Alg)

June 10 - Monrovia
Liberia 0
Angola 0
Att: 15,000. **Ref:** Lemghaifry (Mtn)

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 2ND ROUND: GROUP J	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Uganda	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Angola	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Liberia	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Remaining matchdays:
22.03.13, 07.06.13, 14.06.13, 06.09.13
Each team plays 6 times

- Group winners will qualify for the 3rd round

3rd round

- The 10 qualifiers will be paired in 5 2-leg ties (to be played between 11.10.13 and 19.11.13), the winners of which will qualify for the finals

ASIA SECTION

- 4.5 finals places available

4th round

Group A

June 3 - Beirut
Lebanon 0
Qatar 1 (Soria 64)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 40,000. **Ref:** Shukralla (Bhr)

June 3 - Tashkent
Uzbekistan 0
Iran 1 (Khalatbary 90+4)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 9,000. **Ref:** Nishimura (Jap)
Uzbekistan: Nesterov - Ismailov, Innomov, Khasanov (Turaev 68), Haydarov, Ahmedov, Andreev, Geynrikh, Kapadze, J Hasanov (Bakaev 87), Karpenko (Bikmaev 50).
Iran: Rahmati - Mahini, P Nouri, Montazeri, J Hosseini, Teymourian, Jabbari (Ansarifard 75), Nekounam, A Karimi, Hajsafy (Khalatbary 61), Ebrahimi (K Heydari 44).

June 8 - Beirut
Lebanon 1 (Al Saadi 34)
Uzbekistan 1 (Khasanov 12)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 13,000. **Ref:** Al Hilali (Oma)
Uzbekistan: Nesterov - Ismailov, Khasanov (Bikmaev 90), Djeparov, Ahmedov, Geynrikh (Bakaev 75), Tursunov (J Hasanov 88), Kapadze, Denisov, Tuhtahujaev, Karpenko.

June 8 - Doha
Qatar 1 (Ali 22)
South Korea 4 (Lee Keun-ho 26, 80, Kwak Tae-hwi 55, Kim Shin-wook 64)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 10,730. **Ref:** Albadwawi (UAE)
South Korea: Jung Sung-ryong - Choi Hyo-jin, Kwak Tae-hwi, Lee Jung-soo, Park Joo-ho, Kim Do-heon (Ji Dong-won 81), Ki Sung-yueng, Lee Keun-ho, Koo Ja-cheol (Kim Shin-wook 56), Kim Bo-kyung, Lee Dong-gook (Nam Tae-hee 75).

June 12 - Tehran
Iran 0
Qatar 0
Att: 80,000. **Ref:** Green (Aus)
Iran: Rahmati - Pouladi, Mahini (Dejagah 54), J Hosseini, Aghili, K Heydari, Teymourian, Nekounam, A Karimi, Hajsafy (Khalatbary 46), Ansarifard (M Zare 90).

June 12 - Goyang
South Korea 3 (Kim Bo-kyung 30, 48, Koo Ja-cheol 90)
Lebanon 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 36,756. **Ref:** Toma (Jap)
South Korea: Jung Sung-ryong - Lee Jung-soo, Kwak Tae-hwi, Oh Beom-seok, Park Joo-ho, Kim Jung-woo (Ji Dong-won 78), Yeom Ki-hun (Son Heung-min 63), Kim Bo-kyung, Ki Sung-yueng (Koo Ja-cheol 20), Lee Keun-ho, Lee Dong-gook.

WC QUALS: ASIA – 4TH ROUND: GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	2	2	0	0	7	1	6
Iran	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Qatar	3	1	1	1	2	4	4
Uzbekistan	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Lebanon	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

Group B

June 3 - Saitama
Japan 3 (K Honda 11, Maeda 51, Okazaki 54)
Oman 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 63,551. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
Japan: Kawashima - Uchida (Sakai 57), Yoshida, Konno, Nagatomo, Hasebe, Endo (Hosogai 86), K Honda, Kagawa, Okazaki (Kiyotake 73), Maeda.

June 3 - Amman
Jordan 1 (Hayel 43)
Iraq 1 (Akram 14)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 13,000. **Ref:** Kovalenko (Uzb)

June 8 - Saitama
Japan 6 (Maeda 18, K Honda 22, 31, pen 53, Kagawa 35, Kurihara 89)
Jordan 0
HT: 4-0. **Att:** 60,874. **Ref:** Kim (SKo)
Sent off: Deeb (Jordan) 27min
Japan: Kawashima - Nagatomo, Uchida, Konno (Inoha 72), Yoshida (Kurihara 44), K Honda (K Nakamura 57), Endo, Hasebe, Kagawa, Okazaki, Maeda.

June 8 - Muscat
Oman 0
Australia 0
Att: 11,000. **Ref:** Faghani (Irn)
Australia: Schwarzer - North, Neill, Ognenovski, Wilkshire (Kruse 83), Carney, Valeri, McKay, Bresciano, Kewell (Thompson 59), Brosque.

June 12 - Brisbane
Australia 1 (Wilkshire pen 70)
Japan 1 (Kurihara 65)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 40,189. **Ref:** Al Ghamdi (Sau)
Australia: Schwarzer - North, Neill, Ognenovski, Wilkshire (Kruse 90+1), Carney, Valeri, McKay (Rukavytsya 64), Bresciano (Milligan 12), Cahill, Brosque. *Sent off: Milligan 55min.*
Japan: Kawashima - Nagatomo, Uchida (Sakai 72), Kurihara, K Honda, Endo, Kagawa (Inoha 90+1), Konno, Hasebe, Okazaki (Kiyotake 85), Maeda. *Sent off: Kurihara 89min.*

June 12 - Doha, Qatar
Iraq 1 (Mahmoud pen 37)
Oman 1 (M Al Balushi 8)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 1,650. **Ref:** Abdou (Qat)

WC QUALS: ASIA – 4TH ROUND: GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	3	2	1	0	10	1	7
Iraq	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Australia	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Oman	3	0	2	1	1	4	2
Jordan	2	0	1	1	1	7	1

Remaining matchdays:
11.09.12, 16.10.12, 14.11.12, 26.03.13, 04.06.13, 11.06.13, 18.06.13
Each team plays 8 times

- The top 2 in both groups will qualify for the finals
- The 2 3rd-placed teams will meet in a 2-leg play-off (06.09.13 & 10.09.13), the winner of which will meet the 5th-placed South American team in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

CONCACAF SECTION

- 3.5 finals places available

3rd round

Group A

June 8 - Kingston
Jamaica 2 (Phillips 40, R Johnson 46)
Guatemala 1 (Pezzarossi 90+2)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 14,000. **Ref:** Moreno (Pan)
Jamaica: Ricketts (Miller 20) - Nosworthy, Morrison, Mariappa, Phillips, Palmer, Watson, Austin, Shelton (Fuller 70), Richards, R Johnson (T Stewart 86).
Guatemala: Jerez - Vasquez, Morales, Gallardo, Velasquez, Arreola (Pezzarossi 46), Galindo (Contreras 46), L Rodriguez, Pappa (M Rodriguez 46), Ruiz, J Lopez.

June 8 - Tampa
United States 3 (Bocanegra 8, Dempsey pen 44, Gomez 72)
Antigua & Barbuda 1 (Byers 65)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 23,971. **Ref:** Cruz (CR)
United States: Howard - Cherundolo, Goodson, Bocanegra, Torres (Onyewu 57), Edu, Bradley, Jones (Boyd 81), Donovan, Dempsey, Gomez (Altidore 80).
Antigua & Barbuda: James - McCoy, Joseph, Dublin, Griffith, Burton, Leigertwood, Robinson, Murtagh (Byers 62), T Thomas (Smith 83), Blackstock.

June 12 - St John's
Antigua & Barbuda 0
Jamaica 0
Att: 8,500. **Ref:** Lancaster (Guy)
Antigua & Barbuda: James - McCoy, Dublin, Joseph, Griffith, Robinson, Murtagh (Smith 73), Leigertwood, T Thomas (Parker 88), Burton, Byers.
Jamaica: Miller - Nosworthy, Morrison, Mariappa, Phillips, Palmer, Watson, Austin, Shelton (T Stewart 67), Richards (Stevens 75), R Johnson (Fuller 90).

June 12 - Guatemala City
Guatemala 1 (Pappa 83)
United States 1 (Dempsey 40)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 18,000. **Ref:** Aguilar (ESv)
Guatemala: Jerez - Morales, Gallardo, L Rodriguez, Vasquez, Velasquez, Contreras (Leon 46), Figueroa (Pappa 46), M Rodriguez (Pezzarossi 46), Ruiz, Avila.
United States: Howard - Cherundolo, Goodson (Cameron 46), Bocanegra, F Johnson, Edu, Bradley, Jones, Donovan (Beckerman 90+3), Dempsey, Gomez (Altidore 64).

WC QUALS: CONCACAF – 3RD ROUND: GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
United States	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Jamaica	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Guatemala	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Antigua & B'da	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

JAMAICA

Curfew pair omitted

Birmingham City striker Marlon King and Motherwell winger Chris Humphrey were dropped from the squad for the opening World Cup qualifiers against Guatemala and Antigua & Barbuda after breaking curfew rules.

Jamaica picked up four points from the two games.

First cap...Miyaichi (right)

JAPAN

Debut successes

Arsenal winger Ryo Miyaichi came off the bench to make his international debut as goals from Shinji Kagawa and Shinji Okazaki gave Japan a comfortable 2-0 victory over Azerbaijan.

Kashiwa Reysol defender Hiroki Sakai and Tokyo midfielder Hideto Takahashi also won their first caps.

LIBYA

Winning start

The "home" World Cup qualifier against Cameroon was moved from Tripoli to Sfax in Tunisia and played behind closed doors at the Taieb Mhiri Stadium. A goal in the third minute of added time – from sub Hamed Ahniash, who had only been on the pitch for five minutes – secured a 2-1 victory.

Red alert...Libya's Ahmed Zuway

Group B

June 8 - San Jose
Costa Rica 2 (Saborio 10, Campbell 15)
El Salvador 2 (Gutierrez 23, Romero 54)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 23,701. **Ref:** Lopez (Gtm)
Costa Rica: Navas - Salvatierra, Umana, Miller, Oviedo, Barrantes, Borges (Rojas 46), Azofeifa (Vargas 89), Brenes (Castillo 66), Saborio, Campbell.
El Salvador: Villalobos - Turcios, Garcia, Purdy, Pacheco, D Alas, R Sanchez (Figueroa 60), J Alas, Romero (Quintanilla 85), Burgos (Blanco 77), Gutierrez.

June 8 - Mexico City
Mexico 3 (Salcido 12, G Dos Santos 15, Rodrigues og 51)
Guyana 1 (Moreno og 62)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 80,401. **Ref:** Santos (PR)
Mexico: Corona - F Rodriguez, Salcido, Meza, Moreno, G Dos Santos (Reyna 60), Zavala, Guardado, Barrera (Andrade 65), De Nigris (Torres Nilo 80), J Hernandez.
Guyana: Williams - J Newton, L Cort, Rodrigues, Moore, K Jacobs, H Newton (G Richardson 46), McKinnon, Nurse, Shakes (Peters 71), C Cort (Abrams 80).

June 12 - San Salvador
El Salvador 1 (Pacheco 64)
Mexico 2 (Zavala 60, Moreno 81)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 29,712. **Ref:** Pineda (Hnd)
El Salvador: Villalobos - Garcia, Purdy, Turcios, R Sanchez, Romero (Quintanilla 79), D Alas, Pacheco, J Alas, Burgos (Blanco 66), Gutierrez (Bonilla 82).
Mexico: Corona - F Rodriguez, Salcido, Meza, Moreno, Torres Nilo, G Dos Santos (Reyna 67), Zavala, Guardado (Andrade 65), Barrera (Ayala 86), J Hernandez.

June 12 - Georgetown
Guyana 0
Costa Rica 4 (Saborio 20, 26, 52, Campbell 77)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 11,000. **Ref:** Brea (Cub)
Guyana: Williams - J Newton (Peters 79), L Cort, Rodrigues, Moore, K Jacobs (Bourne 46), McKinnon, G Richardson, Shakes, Nurse, C Cort (Abrams 62).
Costa Rica: Navas - G Gonzalez, Salvatierra (Mora 72), Miller, Oviedo, Barrantes, Cubero, Castillo (P Lopez 59), Campbell, Rojas, Saborio (Borges 79).

WC QUALS: CONCACAF – 3RD ROUND: GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Costa Rica	2	1	1	0	6	2	4
El Salvador	2	0	1	1	3	4	1
Guyana	2	0	0	2	1	7	0

Group C

June 8 - Havana
Cuba 0
Canada 1 (Occean 55)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 7,000. **Ref:** Campbell (Jam)
Cuba: Cooper - Urgelles (Corrales 81), Marquez, R Fernandez, Y Colome, Francisco, A Martinez, M Hernandez, Gomez (Adonis Ramos 75), A Cervantes, Aira (Linares 79).
Canada: Hirschfeld - Edgar, Hainault, McKenna, Jazic, De Guzman (Hutchinson 68), Johnson, Ledgerwood, Ricketts (Borjan 65), De Rosario, Occean (Jackson 81). *Sent off: Hirschfeld 63min.*

June 8 - San Pedro Sula
Honduras 0
Panama 2 (B Perez 64, 80)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 28,215. **Ref:** Garcia (Mex)
Honduras: N Valladares - Sabillon, Bernardez, Leveron, Figueroa, W Palacios (Lozano 46), Delgado, O Garcia, Izaguirre, C Mejia (Johnson 62), Costly.
Panama: Penedo - Baloy, Jean Cedeno, Torres, L Henriquez, Dios Perez (Barahona 72), A Henriquez, Quintero (Sanchez 62), Cooper, Renteria (Godoy 83), B Perez.

June 12 - Toronto
Canada 0
Honduras 0
Att: 16,132. **Ref:** Wijngaarde (Sur)
Canada: Borjan - Edgar, Hainault, McKenna, Jazic, De Guzman, Johnson, Ledgerwood (Ricketts 71), Hutchinson (Jackson 88), De Rosario, Occean (Hume 84).
Honduras: N Valladares - Sabillon, Bernardez, Figueroa, J Garcia, O Garcia, Espinoza, Izaguirre, W Palacios, Costly, Lozano (D Suazo 73).

June 12 - Panama City
Panama 1 (Barahona 58)
Cuba 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 21,000. **Ref:** Geiger (USA)
Panama: Penedo - Torres, L Henriquez, Jean Cedeno, Baloy, A Henriquez, Barahona (Dios Perez 75), Cooper, Quintero, B Perez (Aguilar 46), Renteria (Tejada 59).
Cuba: Cooper - R Fernandez, Y Colome, Marquez, Urgelles (Corrales 88), A Cervantes, M Hernandez, Francisco, Gomez, Aira (Linares 69), A Martinez (Adonis Ramos 60).

WC QUALS: CONCACAF – 3RD ROUND: GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panama	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Canada	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Honduras	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Cuba	2	0	0	2	0	2	0

Remaining matchdays:
07.09.12, 11.09.12, 12.10.12, 16.10.12
Each team plays 6 times

● The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 4th round

4th round

● The 6 qualifiers will form a single group (games to be played between 06.02.13 and 15.10.13), with the top 3 qualifying for the finals
● The 4th-placed team will meet the Oceania section winner in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

EUROPE SECTION

● 13 finals places available

Draw

Group A
Belgium, Croatia, Macedonia, Scotland, Serbia, Wales

Group B
Armenia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Malta

Group C
Austria, Faroe Islands, Germany, Kazakhstan, Republic of Ireland, Sweden

Group D
Andorra, Estonia, Holland, Hungary, Romania, Turkey

Group E
Albania, Cyprus, Iceland, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland

Group F
Azerbaijan, Israel, Luxembourg, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Russia

Group G
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greece, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Slovakia

Group H
England, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, San Marino, Ukraine

Group I
Belarus, Finland, France, Georgia, Spain

Games to be played between 07.09.12 and 15.10.13
Each team plays 10 times (except Gp I, 8 times)

● The 9 group winners will qualify for the finals
● The 8 runners-up with the best record will be paired in 4 2-leg play-offs (15.11.13 & 19.11.13), the winners of which will also qualify for the finals

OCEANIA SECTION

● 0.5 finals places available

2nd round

Games played in Honiara, Solomon Islands

Group A

June 1
Samoa 1 (Malo 70)
Tahiti 10 (L Tehau 7, 83, 84, 86, J Tehau 17, 78, A Tehau 19, 40, T Tehau 54, Chong Hue 60)
HT: 0-4. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Oiaka (Sol)

June 1
Vanuatu 2 (Tasso 52, Naprapol 61)
New Caledonia 5 (Kai 32, 58, 76, Gope-Fenepej 66, R Kayara 87)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 5,000. **Ref:** O'Leary (NZ)

June 3
Vanuatu 5 (Naprapol 26, Kaltak 45+1, Malas 46, Tasso 74, Vava 90+3)
Samoa 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 2,200. **Ref:** Saohu (Sol)

June 3
Tahiti 4 (A Tehau 19, Vallar pen 29, L Tehau 32, Degage 84)
New Caledonia 3 (Bako 74, Haeko 80, Kauma 86)
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 3,500. **Ref:** Kerr (NZ)
Sent off: Gope-Fenepej 28min, Jean Patrick Wakanumune 55min (both New Caledonia)

June 5
New Caledonia 9 (R Kayara 10, Haeko 11, 45+1, 71, 89, 90+1, Kabeu 22, Ixoee pen 25, Gnipate 44)
Samoa 0
HT: 6-0. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Oiaka (Sol)

June 5
Tahiti 4 (Vallar pen 15, J Tehau 38, A Tehau 57, T Tehau 87)
Vanuatu 1 (Tasso 90+5)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** O'Leary (NZ)

WC QUALS: OCEANIA – 2ND RND: GP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tahiti (Q)	3	3	0	0	18	5	9
N Caledonia (Q)	3	2	0	1	17	6	6
Vanuatu	3	1	0	2	8	9	3
Samoa	3	0	0	3	1	24	0

Group B

June 2
Fiji 0
New Zealand 1 (Smith 8)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Assiene-Ambassa (NC)
New Zealand: Paston (Gleeson 53) - Lochhead, Sigmund, Smith, Bertos, McGlinchey, Smeltz, Killen, Vicelich, Barbarouses (Fallon 81), Rojas (Wood 54).

June 2
Solomon Islands 1 (Totori 5)
Papua New Guinea 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Hauata (Tah)

June 4
Papua New Guinea 1 (Hans pen 88)
New Zealand 2 (Smeltz 2, Wood 53)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** George (Van)
New Zealand: Gleeson - Lochhead, Sigmund (Myers 85), Smith, McGlinchey, Smeltz (Payne 68), Killen (Clapham 58), Vicelich, Brockie, Barbarouses, Wood. *Sent off: Lochhead 89min (retrospectively).*

June 4
Fiji 0
Solomon Islands 0
Att: 12,000. **Ref:** Zitouni (Tah)

June 6
Papua New Guinea 1 (Jack 85)
Fiji 1 (Dunadamu 13)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Zitouni (Tah)

June 6
New Zealand 1 (Wood 13)
Solomon Islands 1 (Totori 56)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 18,000. **Ref:** Hauata (Tah)
New Zealand: Gleeson - Myers, Smith, Hogg, Bertos (Brockie 59), Rojas (Barbarouses 59), Fallon (McGeorge 63), Clapham, Boxall, Wood, Payne.

WC QUALS: OCEANIA – 2ND RND: GP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
N Zealand (Q)	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Solomon Is (Q)	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Fiji	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
Papua NG	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

● The top 2 in both groups qualified for the 3rd round

The 2nd round doubled as the group stage of the Oceania Nations Cup. See separate Oceania Nations Cup section for details of the remainder of that tournament

3rd round

● The 4 qualifiers will form a single group (games to be played between 07.09.12 and 26.03.13), the winner of which will meet the 4th-placed CONCACAF team in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

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MAURITANIA

CAF ban lifted

CAF has lifted a two-year ban imposed on Mauritania following their withdrawal from the 2012 Africa Nations Cup qualifiers.

The team, led by former Niger, Guinea and DR Congo coach Patrice Neveu, will now participate in the qualification campaign for the 2015 tournament.

MEXICO

Toulon victory

Goals from Candido Ramirez, Hiram Mier and Alan Pulido gave Mexico a 3-0 victory over Turkey in the Final of the Toulon Tournament ahead of the Olympic Games in London.

The Mexico under-23 side saw off fellow London 2012 qualifiers Belarus and Morocco in the group stage before twice coming from behind to beat Holland 4-2 in the semi-finals.

Mexico's Marco Fabian was the tournament's top scorer with seven goals.

NEW ZEALAND

Youngest-ever skipper

Ipswich Town's Tommy Smith became the All Whites' youngest-ever captain, at the age of 22, when he led the side in a 2-2 draw with El Salvador.

Goals from Auckland City's Ian Hogg, on his debut, and striker Kosta Barbarouses of Russia's Alania Vladikavkaz cancelled out an early strike from Rafael Burgos and a Michael Boxall own goal. Burnley's 17-year-old midfielder Cameron Howieson also made his debut for the Kiwis.

Young leader...Smith

SOUTH AMERICA SECTION

● 5.5 finals places available, one of which goes automatically to host Brazil

June 2 - Buenos Aires
Argentina 4 (Aguero 19, Higuain 29, Messi 31, Di Maria 75)
Ecuador 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 50,000. **Ref:** Rivera (Per)
Argentina: Romero - Zabaleta, Fernandez, Garay, C Rodriguez, Gago, Mascherano, Di Maria (Maxi Rodriguez 82), Messi, Higuain (Lavezzi 73), Aguero (Sosa 62).
Ecuador: Dominguez - Achilier, Campos, Guagua, W Ayovi, Noboa, P Quinonez, Saritama (J Ayovi 39), Valencia, Suarez (Montero 46), Benitez (Ibarra 84).

June 2 - La Paz
Bolivia 0
Chile 2 (Aranguiz 45+3, Vidal 83)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 34,389. **Ref:** Intriago (Ecu)
Bolivia: D Vaca - Vargas, Mendez, Ronald Rivero, L Gutierrez, Flores, Chumacero, Campos (Cardozo 56), Escobar (Pena 73), Arce, Pedriel (Andaveris 69). *Sent off: L Gutierrez 53min.*
Chile: Bravo - O Gonzalez, Rojas, P Contreras, Aranguiz (Leal 87), Vidal, Diaz, Mena, M Fernandez (Figueroa 73), Sanchez, Suazo (Vargas 78).

June 2 - Montevideo
Uruguay 1 (Forlan 38)
Venezuela 1 (J S Rondon 83)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 57,000. **Ref:** Arias (Par)
Uruguay: Muslera - M Pereira, Lugano (Coates 77), Godin, Caceres, Perez (A Gonzalez 74), Arevalo, A Pereira, Forlan (Abreu 88), Suarez, Cavani.
Venezuela: Vega - Rosales, Vizcarrondo, Amorebieta, Cichero, Rincon, Di Giorgi (Orozco 75), Arango, Seijas (Perozo 88), F Feltscher (Fedor 54), J S Rondon.

June 3 - Lima
Peru 0
Colombia 1 (Rodriguez 52)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 35,724. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)
Peru: Penny - Ramos, Galliquio, Alvarez, Yotun, Revoredo (Ruidiaz 68), Lobaton (Chiroque 57), Cruzado, Ramirez, Carrillo (Farfan 85), Guerrero.
Colombia: Ospina - L Perea, A Mosquera, Yepes, Armero, Sanchez, Guarin (Mejia 86), Cuadrado (A Ramirez 72), Rodriguez (J Martinez 90), Pabon, Falcao.

June 9 - La Paz
Bolivia 3 (Pena 10, Escobar 70, 80)
Paraguay 1 (C Riveros 83)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 17,320. **Ref:** Silvera (Uru)
Bolivia: Galarza - Vargas, Jimenez, Valverde, Barba, Flores, Chumacero, Mojica (Chavez 70), Escobar (Cardozo 85), Pena, Martins (Andaveris 84).
Paraguay: Villar - Mazacotte, Roman, Torres, Da Silva, Aranda (Perez 70), C Riveros, Martinez, Ramos (Benitez 55), Haedo Valdez, Zeballos (Caballero 68).

June 9 - Puerto La Cruz
Venezuela 0
Chile 2 (M Fernandez 85, Aranguiz 90+1)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 35,000. **Ref:** Buitrago (Col)
Venezuela: Vega - Rosales, Vizcarrondo, Perozo, Cichero, Di Giorgi, Alvarez (Guerra 63), Seijas (Orozco 81), Arango, J S Rondon, Fedor (Del Valle 63).
Chile: Bravo - O Gonzalez, Rojas (M Gonzalez 30), P Contreras (Figueroa 64), Aranguiz, Diaz, Vidal, Mena, M Fernandez, Suazo (S Pinto 79), Sanchez.

June 10 - Quito
Ecuador 1 (Benitez 54)
Colombia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 37,353. **Ref:** Seneme (Bra)
Ecuador: Dominguez - Paredes, Erazo, Campos, W Ayovi, Castillo, Noboa, Valencia, Montero (Saritama 77), Rojas (Mendez 71), Benitez (Minda 90+4). *Sent off: Noboa 86min.*
Colombia: Ospina - L Perea (Zuniga 34), Yepes, A Mosquera, Armero, Sanchez, Guarin (Cuadrado 65), Soto (Muriel 73), Rodriguez, Pabon, Falcao.

June 10 - Montevideo
Uruguay 4 (Suarez 15, M Pereira 30, C Rodriguez 63, Eguren 90+4)
Peru 2 (Godin og 40, Guerrero 48)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 55,000. **Ref:** Vuaden (Bra)
Uruguay: Muslera - M Pereira, Coates, Godin, Caceres, Perez, Arevalo, A Pereira (C Rodriguez 59), Forlan (Ramirez 59), Cavani, Suarez (Eguren 89).
Peru: Penny - Galliquio, Ramos, Alvarez, Yotun, Advincula (Cueva 68), Ramirez, Gonzales (Lobaton 46), Cruzado, J C Fernandez (Carrillo 76), Guerrero.

WC QUALS: SOUTH AMERICA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chile	6	4	0	2	11	10	12
Uruguay	5	3	2	0	14	6	11
Argentina	5	3	1	1	11	4	10
Ecuador	5	3	0	2	6	6	9
Venezuela	6	2	2	2	4	6	8
Colombia	5	2	1	2	5	5	7
Bolivia	6	1	1	4	7	11	4
Paraguay	5	1	1	3	4	9	4
Peru	5	1	0	4	6	11	3

Remaining matchdays:
07.09.12, 11.09.12, 12.10.12, 16.10.12, 22.03.13, 26.03.13, 07.06.13, 11.06.13, 08.09.13, 10.09.13, 11.10.13, 15.10.13
Each team plays 16 times

● The top 4 will qualify for the finals
● The 5th-placed team will meet the winner of the Asia section play-off in a 2-leg play-off for a place in the finals

KEY TO TABLES
(Q) = qualified for next round

2013 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS

1st round

1st leg

June 15 - Alexandria
Egypt 2 (Zidan 9, M Salah 49)
Central African Republic 3 (Hilaire 26, 63, Manga 69)
HT: 1-1
Sent off: Keita (Central African Rep) 35min

2nd legs

June 15 - Blida
Algeria 4 (Kadir 1, Slimani 6, 48, Soudani 65)
Gambia 1 (Gassama 15)
HT: 2-1
Algeria 6-2 on agg

June 16 - Yaounde
Cameroon 1 (Moukandjo 80)
Guinea-Bissau 0
HT: 0-0
Cameroon 2-0 on agg

June 16 - Praia
Cape Verde Islands 3 (Ryan Mendes 12, Djaniny 55, Ze Luis 82)
Madagascar 1 (Voavy 85)
HT: 1-0
Cape Verde Islands 7-1 on agg

June 16 - Blantyre
Malawi 2 (J Banda 32, Kamwendo 73)
Chad 0
HT: 1-0
Malawi 4-3 on agg

June 16 - Windhoek
Namibia 0
Liberia 0
Liberia 1-0 on agg

June 16 - Calabar
Nigeria 2 (I Uche 9, Musa 56)
Rwanda 0
HT: 1-0
Nigeria 2-0 on agg

June 16 - Freetown
Sierra Leone 4 (K Kamara 17, 33, T Bangura 21, 40)
Sao Tome e Principe 2 (Jair Nunes 2, Jose Varela 47)
HT: 4-1
Sierra Leone 5-4 on agg

June 16 - Kampala
Uganda 4 (Mwesigwa 35, Walusimbi pen 52, Massa 65, Okwi 85)
Congo 0
HT: 1-0
Uganda 5-3 on agg

June 17 - Cotonou
Benin 1 (Pote 19)
Ethiopia 1 (Girma 44)
HT: 1-1
Agg 1-1; Ethiopia on away goals

June 17 - Kinshasa
DR Congo 3 (Mbokani 37, Mpeko 43, Kanda 85)
Seychelles 0
HT: 2-0
DR Congo 7-0 on agg

June 17 - Maputo
Mozambique 1 (Sitoe 8)
Tanzania 1 (Morris 89)
HT: 1-0
Agg 2-2; Mozambique 8-7 on pens

June 17 - Lome
Togo 1 (Gakpe 59)
Kenya 0
HT: 0-0
Agg 2-2; Togo on away goals

June 17 - Harare
Zimbabwe 1 (Musona 36)
Burundi 0
HT: 1-0
Agg 2-2; Zimbabwe on away goals
Sent off: Katsande (Zimbabwe) 30min

Delayed 2nd leg: *Central African Republic v Egypt*

Byes to 2nd round: *Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia (the 16 finalists from the 2012 African Nations Cup)*

2nd round

● The 30 countries will be drawn in 15 head-to-head ties, the winners of which will qualify for the finals

1st legs - Sep 7-9, 2012; 2nd legs - Oct 12-14, 2012

Host South Africa qualifies for the finals automatically

OCEANIA NATIONS CUP

In Honiara, Solomon Islands

**For group stage details, see 2nd round of Oceania's World Cup qualifying section. Groups A and B doubled as the group stage of the Oceania Nations Cup*

Semi-finals

June 8
Tahiti 1 (J Tehau 15)
Solomon Islands 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** O'Leary (NZ)
Tahiti: Samin - A Tehau, Ludivion, L Tehau, Caroine, Tchen, Vallar, Chong Hue (T Tehau 75), Bourebare, J Tehau, Simon.
Solomon Islands: Ray (Ramoni 27) - Aengari, Bule, Fa'arodo, Faisi, Naka (Nawo 46), Nate, Qaraba, Kilifa, Totori, Wetney (Luwi 77).

June 8
New Zealand 0
New Caledonia 2 (Kai 60, Gope-Fenepej 90+2)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hauata (Tah)
New Zealand: Gleeson - Lochhead (Fallon 86), Sigmund, Smith, Bertos (Brockie 63), McGlinchey, Smeltz, Killen, Vicelich, Barbarouses, Wood (Rojas 63).
New Caledonia: Nyikeine - Ixoee, E Bearune, Dokunengo, Wacalie, Haeko (R Kayara 75), Bako, Kai (Kaudre 88), Kabeu, Joel Wakanumune, Gope-Fenepej.

3rd-place match

June 10
Solomon Islands 3 (Teleda 48, Totori 54, 88)
New Zealand 4 (Wood 11, 25, 30, Smeltz 90+4)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 7,000. **Ref:** Zitouni (Tah)
Solomon Islands: Ramoni - Bule, Fa'arodo, Faisi, Iniga, Muri (Totori 33), Ngava (Nate 46), Kilifa, Teleda, Tuasulia (Aengari 38), Wickham.
New Zealand: Gleeson - Myers, Smith (Vicelich 53), Hogg, Rojas (Smeltz 77), Brockie, Barbarouses, Clapham, Boxall, Wood (Howieson 64), Payne.

Final

June 10
Tahiti 1 (Chong Hue 11)
New Caledonia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 9,000. **Ref:** O'Leary (NZ)
Tahiti: Samin - A Tehau, Ludivion, L Tehau (Portier 89), Caroine, Tchen, Vallar, Chong Hue, Bourebare (Degage 90), J Tehau, Simon.
New Caledonia: Nyikeine - Ixoee, E Bearune, Dokunengo (M Kayara 66), Wacalie, Haeko, Bako, Kai, Kabeu, Joel Wakanumune, Gope-Fenepej.

Rescued...Obodo

NIGERIA

Obodo kidnapped

Nigeria midfielder Christian Obodo, who plays for Udinese in Italy, was rescued by police after being abducted by kidnappers in the country's oil-rich southern delta. The 29-year-old was grabbed by a group of armed men while on his way to church.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Hit for six

Three players made their international debuts as Northern Ireland conceded six goals for the first time in 51 years, going down 6-0 to Holland in a pre-Euro finals friendly in Amsterdam.

Striker Will Grigg of Walsall and defenders James McPake of Coventry City and Daniel Lafferty of Burnley were awarded their first caps by manager

968 days Poland went without a competitive match before they kicked off Euro 2012

Harsh introduction...Grigg

INTERNATIONALS

BALTIC CUP

In Estonia

Semi-finals

June 1 - Voru
Latvia 5 (Cauna pen 13, Gauracs 17, 48, Visnakovs 36, Smirnovs 81)
Lithuania 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 130. **Ref:** Gestranius (Fin)
Latvia: Vanins - Savcenkovs, Klava, Krjauklis, Laizans (Bulvitis 84), Fertovs (Lazdins 77), Smirnovs, Cauna (Zjuzins 72), Visnakovs (Pereplotkins 77), Gauracs (Kamess 72), Lukjanovs (Sinelnikovs 72). *Sent off: Lazdins 89min, Savcenkovs 90+1min.*
Lithuania: Setkus - Klimavicius (Kijanskas 62), Andriuskevicius, Mikuckis, Borovskij (Elioslus 77), Radavicius, Papsys (Vaitkunas 50), Ivaskevicius (Silenas 42; Jankauskas 84), Pilibaitis, Vicius (Matulevicius 43), Velicka.

June 1 - Tartu
Estonia 1 (Oper 33)
Finland 2 (N Kuqi 10, 22)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 2,470. **Ref:** Direktorenko (Lat)
Estonia: Pareiko - Enar Jaager, Rahn, Klavan, Teniste, Kink (S Puri 46), Dmitrijev, Vassiljev, Kruglov (Ojamaa 81), Ahjupera (Saag 46), Oper.
Finland: Maenpaa - Toivio, J Ojala, Arkivuo (Hurme 62), Raitala, Hamalainen (Halsti 74), Sparv, Ring, P Hetemaj, Pukki (Kolehmainen 46), N Kuqi (Aaritalo 83). *Sent off: Ring 44min.*

3rd-place match

June 3 - Tartu
Lithuania 0
Estonia 1 (Voskoboinikov 18)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 1,096. **Ref:** Kaasik (Est)
Lithuania: Klevinskas - Kijanskas, Jankauskas, Vaitkunas, Freidgeimas, Radavicius, Panka, Kuklys, Pilibaitis (Papsys 46), Matulevicius (Ivaskevicius 73), Velicka. *Sent off: Kijanskas 83min.*
Estonia: Londak - Kams, Barengrub, Morozov, Sisov, Purje (Saag 74), Mosnikov (Luts 85), Vunk, Konsa (S Puri 62), Neemelo (Ahjupera 68), Voskoboinikov (Ojamaa 80).

Final

June 3 - Voru
Latvia 1 (Gauracs 54)
Finland 1 (Kolehmainen 52)
No extra-time. **HT:** 0-0. **Att:** 280. **Ref:** Mazeika (Lit)
Latvia 6-5 on pens
Latvia: Vanins - Bulvitis, Klava, Krjauklis, Laizans, Fertovs, Smirnovs, Cauna, Visnakovs (Zjuzins 77), Gauracs (Kozlovs 82), Lukjanovs (Kamess 72).
Finland: Hradecky (Sillanpaa 46) - Pasanen, Raitala (Hurme 57), Arajuuri, Halsti, Sparv, Sjolund, Kolehmainen, Furuholm (M Ojala 73), Porokara (N Kuqi 57), Pukki.

FRIENDLIES

Tuesday, May 22

May 22 - Madrid, Spain
Albania 2 (Bakaj 46, Bogdani pen 50)
Qatar 1 (Ali 53)
HT: 0-0
Albania: Shehi - Dallku, Cana, Mavraj, Veliu, Vila, Bulku, Lilaj, Bakaj, Cani, Bogdani.

May 22 - Omdurman, Sudan
Egypt 3 (Geddo 25, M Salah 51, 85)
Togo 0
HT: 1-0
Egypt: El Hadary - Fathy (El Mohammady), Fathallah (Ghaly), Hegazy, Meawwad, I Salah (El Taqy), El Nenny, M Salah, Aboutraika (Hassan), Geddo (Mekky), Moteab.

May 22 - Klagenfurt, Austria
Poland 1 (Sobiech 81)
Latvia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 735. **Ref:** Lechner (Aut)
Poland: Fabianski - Wojtkowiak, Wasilewski, Jodlowiec (Kaminski 64), Boenisch (Wawrzyniak 72), Murawski, Polanski, Mierzejewski (Matuszczyk 46), Wolski (Kucharczyk 46), Grosicki, Pawel Brozek (Sobiech 57).
Latvia: Dorosevs - Gorkss, Klava, Laizans (Sinelnikovs 86), Ivanovs, Fertovs, Cauna, Visnakovs (Pereplotkins 73), Rugins, Lukjanovs (Kamess 73), Rudnevs (Gauracs 78).

Wednesday, May 23

May 23 - Gaborone
Botswana 3 (Mogorosi 17, Moloi 31, Ramatlhakwane 90)
Lesotho 0
HT: 2-0

May 23 - Houston, USA
El Salvador 2 (Burgos 12, Boxall og 56)
New Zealand 2 (Hogg 27, Barbarouses 64)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Vaughn (USA)
El Salvador: Villalobos - Garcia, Molina, Pacheco, Figueroa (R Sanchez 46), D Alas, Turcios, Romero (Blanco 59), J Alas (Ceren 75), Bonilla (Quintanilla 59), Burgos (Ulloa 70).
New Zealand: Paston - Boxall, Sigmund, Smith, Bertos (Brockie 65), Vicelich, McGlinchey, Hogg, Rojas (Howieson 72), Smeltz (Wood 65), Barbarouses.

May 23 - Istanbul, Turkey
Iraq 1 (Akram 5)
Sierra Leone 0
HT: 1-0

May 23 - Shizuoka
Japan 2 (Kagawa 42, Nabiyev og 58)
Azerbaijan 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,276. **Ref:** Abdul Bashir (Sin)
Japan: Kawashima - Kurihara, Inoha (Makino 87), Nagatomo, Uchida (Sakai 46), Hasebe (Takahashi 46), Hosogai, K Honda (K Nakamura 74), Kagawa (Miyaichi 62), Okazaki, Morimoto (Maeda 37).
Azerbaijan: Agayev - Shukurov, Abishov (Amirguliyev 72), Medvedev (Nadirov 65), Budak, Allahverdiyev, Gokdemir, Chertoganov, Nabiyev, Aliyev (Subasic 80), Ozkara.

May 23 - Tunis, Tunisia
Libya 2 (Grigma 38, El Maghabul 85)
Rwanda 0
HT: 1-0

May 23 - Lima
Peru 1 (Guerrero 36)
Nigeria 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Espinel (Ecu)
Peru: Penny - Revoredo, Galliquio (Alvarez 46), Ramos, Yotun (Ampuero 46), Gonzales (C Zegarra 73), Lobaton (Guevara 46), Farfan, Palacios (Ramirez 11), Pizarro (J C Fernandez 62), Guerrero.

May 23 - Puerto Ordaz
Venezuela 4 (Seijas 45, J S Rondon 50, 73, Vizcarrondo 53)
Moldova 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Gambetta (Per)
Venezuela: Morales - Rosales (Rivero 58), Vizcarrondo, Perozo, Cichero, Rincon (F Flores 46), Seijas (Guerra 58), Arango (Orozco 46), Perez Greco, Fedor (J S Rondon 46), M Rondon (Del Valle 46).
Moldova: Stanislav Namasco - Golovatenco, Bulgaru, Racu, Caraulan, Cebotaru (Potirniche 77), Patras, Covalciuc, Ovseannicov (Ginsari 83), Doros (Sidorenco 51), Picusciac (Andronic 75).

Thursday, May 24

May 24 - Salzburg, Austria
Turkey 3 (Hamit Altintop 12, Nuri 40, Selcuk Inan pen 82)
Georgia 1 (Targamadze 52)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 11,000. **Ref:** Hameter (Aut)
Turkey: Cenk (Mert 62) - Serdar, Egemen, Omer, Ismail, Hamit Altintop (Caner 70), Mehmet Topal, Nuri (Selcuk Inan 56), Gokhan Tore (Arda 56), Sercan, Mustafa (Umut 61).
Georgia: Loria - Lobzhanidze (Daushvili 46), Kashia, Kvirkvelia (Dzalamidze 89), Amisulashvili, Khizanishvili (Popkhadze 63), Kankava (Lipartia 73), Gelashvili, Targamadze (Okriashvili 65), Dvalishvili (Mchedlidze 46), Kobakhidze.

Friday, May 25

May 25 - Brussels
Belgium 2 (Mirallas 25, Hazard pen 34)
Montenegro 2 (Vucinic 5, Drincic 76)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 25,000. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)
Belgium: Courtois (J-F Gillet 50) - Odoi, Alderweireld, Vertonghen, Lombaerts (Simons 46), Fellaini, Witsel, Hazard, Mirallas (Defour 86), Mertens, De Camargo (Benteke 66).
Montenegro: M Bozovic - Pavicevic (Dzudovic 79), Savic, Basa, Jovanovic (Balic 66), Volkov, Zverotic (Kascelan 66), Drincic, Beciraj (Cetkovic 46), Vukcevic (Nikolic 88), Vucinic (Delibasic 46).

May 25 - San Jose
Costa Rica 3 (J Lopez og 24, Sanchez 35, G Gonzalez 77)
Guatemala 2 (Ruiz 4, 52)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Penaloza (Mex)
Costa Rica: Navas - Johnson, Umana, G Gonzalez, P Lopez, Tejeda (Soto 60), Azofeifa, Rojas (N Monge 86), Sanchez (Acosta 43), Campbell, Brenes (Scott 68). *Sent off: Umana 39min.*
Guatemala: Jerez (Paredes 46) - Flores, L Rodriguez, Gallardo (Avila 46), J Lopez, Leon, Morales, Velasquez (Del Aguila 46), Ramirez (Arreola 46), Ruiz (Figueroa 65), M Rodriguez (Valenzuela 80). *Sent off: Leon 89min.*

May 25 - Pula
Croatia 3 (Corluka 16, Kalinic 20, Vukojevic 81)
Estonia 1 (Vassiljev 83)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 7,668. **Ref:** Fabian (Hun)
Croatia: Subasic - Strinic, Corluka (Vrsaljko 80), Schildenfeld (Simunic 46), Kalinic, Dujmovic (Vukojevic 46), Perisic (Kranjcar 46), Vida, Badelj, Eduardo (Mandzukic 60), Ilicevic (Rakitic 60).
Estonia: Pareiko - Sisov, Klidron (Stepanov 46), Klavan, Kruglov, Konsa (Kams 62), Dmitrijev, Vassiljev, Kink (Vunk 73), Ojamaa (Saag 58), Oper (Tamm 58).

May 25 - Marrakech
Morocco 0
Senegal 1 (Konate 11)
HT: 0-1
Morocco: Lamyaghri - Soulaimani (El Adoua 46), Bergdich, Benatia, Saidi (El Khaliqi 46), Salhi (Abourazzouk 77), Belhanda (Chtaibi 69), Kharja, Mrani, Barrada (Ait-Fana 46), Boussoufa (Amrabat 46).

May 25 - Moscow
Russia 1 (Kerzhakov 50)
Uruguay 1 (Suarez 48)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 18,000. **Ref:** Blom (Hol)
Russia: Malafeev - Anyukov, A Berezutsky (Sharonov 46), Ignashevich, Zhirkov (Kombarov 69), Shirokov, Denisov, Zyryanov (Glushakov 77), Izmailov (Kokorin 77), Pogrebnyak (Kerzhakov 46), Arshavin.
Uruguay: Muslera - M Pereira, Lugano, Godin, Caceres, Perez (Gargano 77), Arevalo, A Pereira (Ramirez 77), Cavani, Suarez, Forlan.

Saturday, May 26

May 26 - Blida
Algeria 3 (Ngounou og 33, Djebbour 38, Soudani 82)
Niger 0
HT: 2-0

May 26 - Ouagadougou
Burkina Faso 2 (Nakouima 44, 65)
Benin 2 (Bello 50, Pote 60)
HT: 1-0

May 26 - Graz, Austria
Czech Republic 2 (Baros pen 17, Lafata 90)
Israel 1 (Shechter 45)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 3,400. **Ref:** Trutz (Slk)
Czech Republic: Drobny - Rajtoral (Gebre Selassie 46), Sivok (Suchy 46), Hubnik, Pudil (Limbersky 79), Jiracek (Lafata 65), Hubschman, Petrzela (Darida 65), Kolar, Pilar, Baros (Necid 46).
Israel: Harosh - Shpungin, Ben Haim (Gershon 72), Tibi, Scheimann, Benayoun (Hemed 74), Natcho, Zahavi (Yadin 69), Melikson (Vermouth 77), Shechter (Refaelov 58), Damari (Sahar 60).

May 26 - Hamburg, Germany
Denmark 1 (Bendtner 71)
Brazil 3 (Hulk 8, 40, Zimling og 13)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 51,000. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Denmark: T Sorensen (Andersen 25) - Wass, Kjaer, Agger, S Poulsen, C Poulsen (J Poulsen 46), Zimling, Eriksen (Rommedahl 62), Schone (Kahlenberg 25), Krohn-Dehli (Pedersen 80), Bendtner.
Brazil: Jefferson - Danilo (Rafael 72), Thiago Silva, Juan, Marcelo (Alex Sandro 69), Sandro (Casemiro 86), Romulo, Oscar, Lucas Silva (Giuliano 83), Leandro Damiao (Wellington Nem 75), Hulk (Bruno Uvini 90+1).

May 26 - Dallas, USA
El Salvador 2 (Bonilla 16, J Alas 23)
Moldova 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 35,000
El Salvador: Villalobos - Garcia (Mendoza 69), Pacheco (Monteagudo 59), Purdy (Molina 78), D Alas, Turcios, R Sanchez (Figueroa 46), Romero (Quintanilla 66), J Alas, Bonilla (Blanco 66), Burgos.

Michael O'Neill, who has now lost both of his games in charge, with a total of nine goals against and none scored. The last time Northern Ireland let in six was when they were beaten 6-1 by Scotland in 1961.

RUSSIA

Suspended sentence

UEFA imposed a suspended six-point deduction for the 2016 European Championship qualifiers after fans were involved in crowd trouble before Russia's Euro 2012 game against Poland in Warsaw.

SCOTLAND

Levein's heavy loss

Scotland's 5-1 loss away to the USA was the heaviest defeat of Craig Levein's reign as manager. Blackpool winger Matt Phillips made his international debut in the game.

SENEGAL

Staking his claim

Caretaker coach Joseph Koto boosted his chances of taking the national job on a permanent basis with a 1-0 win against Morocco in a Marrakech friendly. Moussa Konate scored the goal.

Struggling...Scotland's Charlie Mulgrew (left) and Scott Brown

Moldova: Pascenco - Golovatenco, Bulgaru, Orlovschi, Racu, Covalciuc, Cebotaru, Picusciac (Sidorenco 51), Ovseannicov, Patras (Potirniche 88), Ivanov (Doros 69).

May 26 - Amanvillers, France
Guinea 1 (S Diallo 24)
Cameroon 2 (Choupo-Moting 10, pen 34)
HT: 1-2

May 26 - Amsterdam
Holland 1 (Van Persie 45)
Bulgaria 2 (I Popov pen 50, Mitsanski 90+3)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 45,000. **Ref:** Teixeira Vitienes (Spa)
Holland: Krul - Van der Wiel, Heitinga, Mathijsen (Bouma 16), Willems (Schaars 64), N De Jong (Strootman 65), Van Bommel, Van Persie, Sneijder, Van der Vaart (Kuyt 64), Huntelaar (Robben 77).
Bulgaria: Kolev (Cvorovic 72) - Y Minev (Stoyanov 56), Bodurov, I Ivanov (V Iliev 72), V Minev, Manolev, Dyakov, Gadzhev, Milanov (Zlatinski 85), I Popov (Tonev 78), Bozhinov (Mitsanski 60).

May 26 - Dallas, USA
Honduras 0
New Zealand 1 (Smeltz 44)
HT: 0-1
Honduras: N Valladares - Murillo, Sabillon (Discua 85), Leveron, J Garcia (Berrios 59), A Mejia (C Mejia 59), Delgado, Izaguirre, O Garcia, D Suazo (Lalin 48), Costly (Crisanto 75).
New Zealand: Paston - Sigmund (Boxall 46), Smith, Vicelich, Brockie, Clapham, McGlinchey, Hogg (Bertos 19; Payne 75), Rojas (Howieson 64), Smeltz (Wood 46), Barbarouses (McGeorge 89).

May 26 - Amman
Jordan 4 (Hashhash 2, Al Dardour 33, Al Hajjh 79, Attiah 88)
Sierra Leone 0
HT: 2-0

May 26 - Wurzburg, Germany
Mozambique 0
Namibia 0

May 26 - Oslo
Norway 0
England 1 (Young 9)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 21,496. **Ref:** Weiner (Ger)
Norway: Jarstein - Hogli (Ruud 40), Hangeland, Demidov, J A Riise, Tettey (Jenssen 90+1), Elyounoussi, Henriksen (Berisha 84), Gamst Pedersen (Grindheim 62), Braaten (Huseklepp 74), Abdellaoue.
England: Green - Jones (Kelly 88), Jagielka, Lescott, Baines, Milner, Parker (Walcott 56), Gerrard (Barry 46; Henderson 74), Downing (A Johnson 85), Young (Oxlade-Chamberlain 72), Carroll.

May 26 - Leiria
Portugal 0
Macedonia 0
Att: 19,322. **Ref:** Kelly (Rlr)
Portugal: Beto - Joao Pereira (Nelson Oliveira 81), Rolando, Bruno Alves, Fabio Coentrao, Joao Moutinho (Raul Meireles 46), Miguel Veloso (Hugo Viana 74), Ruben Micael (Nani 64), Ricardo Quaresma, Helder Postiga (Hugo Almeida 64), Cristiano Ronaldo (Varela 74).
Macedonia: Bogatinov - Grncarov, Sikov, Noveski, Ristovski, Spirovski (Ibraimi 55), Gligorov (Demiri 55), Trickovski (Mojsov 85), Urdinov (Georgievski 74), Pandev, Fazli (Hasani 64).

May 26 - Dublin
Republic of Ireland 1 (Long 78)
Bosnia-Herzegovina 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 37,100. **Ref:** Haenni (Swi)
Rep Ireland: Westwood - McShane (Kelly 78), Dunne (St Ledger 70), O'Dea, Ward, Duff (McGeady 46), Whelan (Andrews 46), Gibson, McClean, Keane (Long 62), Doyle (Walters 62).
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Begovic - Mujdza (Zahirovic 56), Jahic, Pandza, Lulic, Pjanic, Rahimic (Stevanovic 46), Medunjanin (Vrancic 46), Misimovic (Alispahic 82), Ibisevic (Vranjes 70), Dzeko.

May 26 - Klagenfurt, Austria
Slovakia 0
Poland 1 (Perquis 30)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 2,100. **Ref:** Eisner (Aut)
Slovakia: Pernis - Pekarik, Michalik, Hubocan, Svento, Kucka (Prochazka 81), Cech, Sestak (Guede 57), Hamsik, Jendrisek (Breznanik 65), Holosko (Bakos 46).
Poland: Szczesny - Piszczek, Wasilewski, Perquis (Kaminski 69), Boenisch, Polanski (Matuszczyk 46), Murawski (Dudka 46), Blaszczykowski (Mierzejewski 63), Obraniak (Wolski 80), Rybus, Lewandowski (Pawel Brozek 46).

May 26 - Kufstein, Austria
Slovenia 1 (Kurtic 88)
Greece 1 (Torosidis 8)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Schorgenhofer (Aut)
Slovenia: S Handanovic - Brecko, Suler, Cesar, Jokic (Kelhar 21), Kurtic, Radosavljevic (Mertelj 85), Vrsic (Ljubijankic 46), Sisic (Birsa 46), Kirm (Ilicic 66), Matavz (Velikonja 79).
Greece: Chalkias - Torosidis (Tziolis 23), A Papadopoulos, Papastathopoulos, Holebas, Maniatis (Liberopoulos 65), Katsouranis (Malezas 46), Karagounis, Ninis (Kone 72), Samaras (Fortounis 46), Gekas (Mitroglou 65).
Sent off: Kone 90min.

May 26 - St Gallen, Switzerland
Spain 2 (Adrian 64, Cazorla pen 75)
Serbia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,625. **Ref:** Zimmermann (Swi)
Spain: Casillas - Juanfran, Albiol, Sergio Ramos (Dominguez 46), Jordi Alba (Monreal 65), Xabi Alonso (Benat 46), Bruno (Javi Garcia 69), Jesus Navas, Cazorla, Soldado (Adrian 46), Negredo (Silva 46).
Serbia: Kahriman - D Tosic, Subotic, Ivanovic, Kolarov, Ignjovski (Fejsa 65), Radovanovic (Matic 65), Basta, Djuricic (Jankovic 65), Ljajic (Z Tosic 76), Lekic (Scepovic 76).

May 26 - Basle
Switzerland 5 (Derdiyok 21, 23, 50, Lichtsteiner 67, Mehmedi 76)
Germany 3 (Hummels 45, Schurrle 64, Reus 72)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 27,381. **Ref:** Gautier (Fra)
Switzerland: Benaglio - Lichtsteiner, Senderos, Von Bergen, Ziegler, Inler, Fernandes (Djourou 90+2), Mehmedi, Xhaka (Wiss 90), Barnetta (Stocker 78), Derdiyok.
Germany: Ter Stegen - Howedes (S Bender 78), Mertesacker, Hummels, Schmelzer, Khedira (Gundogan 46), Gotze (L Bender 78), Schurrle, Ozil (Reus 46), Podolski (Draxler 62), Klose (Cacau 78).

May 26 - Dar es Salaam
Tanzania 0
Malawi 0

May 26 - Salzburg, Austria
Turkey 2 (Burak 21, 55)
Finland 3 (R Eremenko 19, Pukki 73, P Hetemaj 90+2)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Schuttengruber (Aut)
Turkey: Rustu (Cenk 41) - Semih, Emre Belozoglu, Hamit Altintop (Serdar 74), Umut, Hasan Ali, Arda, Mehmet Topal, Burak, Caner (Gokhan Tore 66), Bekir.
Finland: Maenpaa - Pasanen, Toivio (J Ojala 83), Uronen, R Eremenko, Raitala, Pukki (N Kuqi 76), Sparv (P Hetemaj 62), Porokara (Hamalainen 62), Ring (Sjolund 68), Furuholm (Rannankari 90).

May 26 - Jacksonville
United States 5 (Donovan 3, 60, 65, Bradley 11, Jones 70)
Scotland 1 (Cameron og 15)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 44,438. **Ref:** Bonilla (ESv)
United States: Howard (Guzan 71) - Cherundolo, Cameron, Bocanegra (Onyewu 63), F Johnson (Castillo 73), Edu (Beckerman 64), Bradley, Jones, Donovan, Boyd (Gomez 64), Torres (Corona 68).
Scotland: McGregor - Bardsley (Martin 59), G Caldwell, McArthur (Whitaker 59), Mulgrew (L Wallace 68), Webster (Berra 82), Phillips, Brown, Maloney (Mackail-Smith 83), Bannan (Cowie 51), Miller.

Sunday, May 27

May 27 - Istanbul, Turkey
Albania 1 (Vila 60)
Iran 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Gocek (Tur)
Albania: Berisha - Cana, Mavraj, Lila, Veliu, Bulku (Veliaj 90+2), Lilaj (Zeqiri 61), Vila (Osmani 86), Hyka (Sadiku 46), Bakaj (Brahimi 79), Cani (Agolli 68).
Iran: A Haghighi - P Nouri (K Heydari 55), Mahini (Aghili 83), Montazeri, J Hosseini, Teymourian, Jabbari (Dehnavi 77), Nekounam, Hajsafy (Pouladi 46), Ebrahimi (G Rezaei 67), Ansarifard (A Karimi 66).

May 27 - Valenciennes
France 3 (Debuchy 52, Ribery 85, Rami 87)
Iceland 2 (B Bjarnason 28, Sigthorsson 33)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 20,580. **Ref:** Delferiere (Blg)
France: Mandanda - Debuchy, Rami, Mexes, Evra, Gourcuff (Ribery 75), Cabaye (A Diarra 59), Ben Arfa (Malouda 59), Nasri (Martin 59), Menez (Valbuena 75), Benzema (Giroud 59).
Iceland: Halldorsson - Jonasson, Arnason, R Sigurdsson, Valgardsson (A F Skulason 56), R Gislason (J B Gudmondsson 76), A E Gunnarsson, E G Jonsson (Danielsson 65), G Sigurdsson, B Bjarnason, Sigthorsson (Hedinsson 46).

May 27 - Saint-Leu-la-Foret, France
Ivory Coast 2 (Doumbia 22, Bony 54)
Mali 1 (S Keita pen 74)
HT: 1-0

May 27 - Kingston
Jamaica 0
Panama 1 (Renteria 17)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Morales (Mex)
Jamaica: Miller - Virgo (Lloyd 76), C Davis, Nosworthy, Laing (Phillips 46), Grandison, Senior (Stevens 66), R Reid, K Daley (Humphrey 46), Shelton (King 67), Fuller.
Panama: Penedo - Cummings, Vasquez (Algandona 77), Waithe (Yau 69), Sanchez (Jean Cedeno 80), Miller, L Henriquez, Godoy, A Henriquez (J Perez 81), Renteria (Javier Cedeno 89), Aguilar.

May 27 - Ain Draham, Tunisia
Libya 1 (Al Sbai 64)
Chad 0
HT: 0-0

May 27 - East Rutherford, USA
Mexico 2 (De Nigris 43, 89)
Wales 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 35,518. **Ref:** Salazar (USA)
Mexico: Corona - F Rodriguez, Salcido, Meza, Moreno, Andrade (Jimenez 89), G Dos Santos (Torres Nilo 70), Zavala (Molina 63), L Perez (Reyna 70), Barrera (Marquez 76), De Nigris.
Wales: Brown - Matthews (Ricketts 60), Gunter, A Williams, N Taylor (Richards 80), Edwards (King 70), Allen, Ramsey, Robson-Kanu (Vokes 59), Bellamy, Morison (Church 59).

May 27 - Muscat
Oman 1 (Al Saadi 54)
Lebanon 1 (Ghaddar 23)
HT: 0-1

May 27 - Monastir
Tunisia 5 (Jemal pen 16, Harbaoui 50, 53, Jemaa 68, Saihi 77)
Rwanda 1 (Badi 57)
HT: 1-0
Tunisia: Mathlouthi (Kasraoui 46) - Boussaidi, Jemal, Boulaabi (Traoui 67), Gharbi, Saihi, Ben Yahia (Jemaa 55), Hammami, Harbaoui (Ben Massaoud 80), Khelifa, Allagui (Ben Hatira 46).

Monday, May 28

May 28 - Bogota
Colombia 7 (Rodriguez 12, J Martinez 21, 35, Guyana og 30, Muriel 47, 82, Guarin 53)
Guyana 1 (Abrams 90)
HT: 4-0
Played behind closed doors
Colombia: Ospina - Zuniga, A Mosquera, Yepes, Armero, Ramos, Sanchez, Guarin, Rodriguez, J Martinez, Pabon.
Guyana: Williams - Pollard, L Cort, Rodrigues, J Newton, Moore, Peters, McKinnon, Benfield, Beveney, C Cort.

May 28 - Istanbul, Turkey
Iraq 1 (Jassim 5)
Botswana 1 (Tshireletso 90+1)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Gocek (Tur)

May 28 - Doha
Qatar 0
Palestine 0

May 28 - Kufstein, Austria
Ukraine 4 (Yarmolenko 9, Husiev pen 35, Voronin 41, Milevskyi 50)
Estonia 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 500. **Ref:** Lechner (Aut)
Ukraine: Pyatov - Husiev (Butko 63), Mykhalyk (Rakytskyi 46), Khacheridi, Selin, Tymoshchuk, Nazarenko (Seleznyov 54), Yarmolenko (Shevchenko 46), Konoplyanka, Devych (Milevskyi 46), Voronin (Aliyev 46).
Estonia: Aksalu - Sisov (Palatu 61), Stepanov, Klavan, Kruglov, Kams (Lindpere 46), Dmitrijev (Vassiljev 46), Vunk, Konsa (Kink 46), Tamm (Oper 46), Saag.

May 28 - Zanzibar Town
Zanzibar 1 (Hamoud 89)
Malawi 1 (F Banda 60)
HT: 0-0

On his way...Mosimane

SOUTH AFRICA

Coach pays price

National coach Pitso Mosimane was sacked after a disappointing 1-1 draw with Ethiopia in the country's opening World Cup qualifier.

After a further draw with Botswana, *Bafana Bafana* avoided a record-breaking ninth game in a row without a win when they beat Gabon 3-0 in a friendly in Nelspruit. Goals from Siphiwe Tshabalala, Tokelo Rantie and Mzikayise Mashaba secured the team's first win since August 2011, after a run of six draws and two defeats.

SPAIN

Debut goal but no place

Despite scoring on his debut, in the 2-0 win against Serbia, Atletico Madrid's Adrian Lopez missed out on making coach Vicente Del Bosque's final 23 for the European Championship finals.

Lopez, who also won the penalty from which Santi Cazorla scored Spain's second, was one of five debutants used on the night, along with Juanfran, Alvaro Dominguez, Benat and Javi Garcia.

Still not enough...Lopez

INTERNATIONALS

Tuesday, May 29

May 29 - Estoril, Portugal
Angola 0
Macedonia 0
Att: 200. **Ref:** Proenca (Por)
Macedonia: Nuredinoski - Georgievski, Sikov, Noveski, Grncarov (Mojsov 46), Trickovski (Hasani 58), Demiri (Gligorov 46), Urdinov, Ivanovski (Fazli 62), Ibraimi (Muarem 90), Pandev (Spirovski 46).

May 29 - Salzburg, Austria
Bulgaria 0
Turkey 2 (Omer 22, Burak 90+1)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Grobelnik (Aut)
Bulgaria: Kolev (P Iliev 76) - Manolev (Ivan Stoyanov 76), Bodurov, Zanev, V Iliev, Bandalovski, Zlatinski (Mitsanski 46), Dyakov, Gadzhev (Velev 78), Gargarov (Galchev 56), I Popov (Tonev 64).
Turkey: Mert - Serdar (Hamit Altintop 46), Bekir, Omer, Ismail (Hasan Ali 44), Tunay (Burak 78), Emre Belozoglu, Arda, Nuri (Caner 78), Sercan (Mustafa 89), Umut.

May 29 - Nyon, Switzerland
Russia 0
Lithuania 0
Att: 1,000. **Ref:** Bergonzi (Ita)
Russia: Akinfeev - Anyukov, A Berezutsky, Ignashevich, Arshavin, Kombarov (Zhirkov 46), Denisov, Zyryanov (Dzagoev 46), Shirokov (Semshov 72), Izmailov (Kokorin 46), Kerzhakov (Pavlyuchenko 46).
Lithuania: Setkus - Klimavicius, Andriuskevicius (Vaitkunas 85), Mikuckis, Borovskij, D Cesnauskis (Papsys 56), Mikoliunas (Eliosius 71), Pilibaitis (Panka 64), Vicius (Radavicius 49), Sernas (Matulevicius 81), Velicka.

Wednesday, May 30

May 30 - Kelsterbach, Germany
Azerbaijan 0
Andorra 0
Ref: Weiner (Ger)
Azerbaijan: Agayev - Shukurov, Allahverdiyev, Abishov, Budak (Gokdemir 63), Chertoganov, Amirguliyev, Nadirov (Pamuk 70), Mammedov, Umarov (Ozkara 46), Aliyev (Subasic 63).

May 30 - Sousse, Tunisia
Chad 1 (Iranzi og 80)
Rwanda 1 (Nshimiyimana 60)
HT: 0-0

May 30 - Rotterdam
Holland 2 (Salata og 8, Van der Vaart 75)
Slovakia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 45,000. **Ref:** Bezborodov (Rus)
Holland: Stekelenburg - Van der Wiel, Heitinga, Bouma (Vlaar 46), Schaars, N De Jong, Van Bommel, Robben (Narsingh 84), Sneijder (Van der Vaart 52), Afellay (Kuyt 80), Van Persie (Huntelaar 68).
Slovakia: Mucha - Pekarik, Salata, Hubocan, Svento, Stoch (Kopunek 81), Cech (Guldan 76), Guede (Kona 46), Hamsik, Breznanik (Prochazka 46), Bakos (Holosko 78).

May 30 - Berne, Switzerland
Spain 4 (Fernando Torres 11, Xabi Alonso pen 52, Cazorla 56, Negredo 79)
South Korea 1 (Kim Do-heon 43)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 10,220. **Ref:** Bieri (Swi)
Spain: Reina (Casillas 80) - Arbeloa, Albiol, Sergio Ramos (Dominguez 57), Monreal, Cazorla (Adrian 57), Xabi Alonso (Bruno 65), Benat, Silva, Fernando Torres (Negredo 57), Mata (Soldado 57).
South Korea: Kim Jin-hyeon - Choi Hyo-jin, Cho Yong-hyung, Lee Jung-soo, Park Joo-ho, Nam Tae-hee (Kim Chi-woo 63), Kim Do-heon (Oh Beom-seok 80), Koo Ja-cheol (Kim Jae-sung 75), Yeom Ki-hun (Kim Bo-kyung 46), Son Heung-min (Park Hyun-beom 57), Ji Dong-won (Lee Dong-gook 57).

May 30 - Gothenburg
Sweden 3 (Ibrahimovic 2, Toivonen 14, Wilhelmsson 77)
Iceland 2 (Sigthorsson 27, Jonasson 90+4)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 14,379. **Ref:** Rasmussen (Den)
Sweden: Isaksson - Mellberg, Granqvist, R Elm (Holmen 62), S Larsson (Bajrami 46), Kallstrom (Wernbloom 46), J Olsson (Antonsson 81), Safari, Rosenberg (Hysen 46), Ibrahimovic (Wilhelmsson 62), Toivonen.
Iceland: Halldorsson - R Sigurdsson, Danielsson (E G Jonsson 66), B Bjarnason (J B Gudmundsson 81), Sigthorsson (Finnbogason 58), G Sigurdsson, R Gislason, Arnason (Eyjolfsson 83), Jonasson, A E Gunnarsson, A F Skulason.

May 30 - Lucerne
Switzerland 0
Romania 1 (Grozav 56)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 11,850. **Ref:** Moen (Nor)
Switzerland: Sommer - Lichtsteiner, Senderos, Djourou, Ziegler (Morganella 85), Stocker (Emeghara 64), Inler, Xhaka (Wiss 76), Barnetta, Mehmedi (Winter 64), Derdiyok.
Romania: Lobont - Papp, Chiriches, Grozav (Chipciu 65), Rat, Gaman (Golan 85), Bourceanu (Lazar 55), Torje (Maxim 82), Florescu (Grigore 55), Tanase, D Nicutae (Alexe 52).

May 30 - Landover
United States 1 (Gomez 45)
Brazil 4 (Neymar pen 12, Thiago Silva 26, Marcelo 52, Alexandre Pato 87)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 67,619. **Ref:** Calderon (CR)
United States: Howard - Cherundolo (Parkhurst 73), Onyewu, Bocanegra, F Johnson (Castillo 80), Edu (Boyd 73), Bradley, Jones (Beckerman 80), Donovan, Gomez, Torres (Dempsey 56).
Brazil: Rafael Cabral - Danilo, Thiago Silva, Juan, Marcelo (Alex Sandro 89), Sandro, Romulo, Oscar (Giuliano 89), Hulk (Casemiro 82), Leandro Damiao (Alexandre Pato 64), Neymar (Lucas Silva 84).

Thursday, May 31

May 31 - Reims
France 2 (Ribery 11, Malouda 16)
Serbia 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Kircher (Ger)
France: Lloris - Reveillere, Koscielny, Mexes (Rami 70), Clichy, Cabaye (Martin 60), M'Vila (A Diarra 6), Malouda (Ben Arfa 76), Nasri, Benzema (Giroud 60), Ribery (Menez 60).
Serbia: Brkic - Ivanovic, Maksimovic, Rajkovic, Ninkov, Fejsa (Radovanovic 59), Matic (Mijailovic 59), Mladenovic (Kolarov 59), Tadic (Tomic 80), Scepovic, Jankovic (Lazovic 74).

May 31 - Leipzig
Germany 2 (Gomez 40, Schurrle 82)
Israel 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 43,241. **Ref:** Blom (Hol)
Germany: Neuer - Boateng, Mertesacker, Badstuber, Lahm, Khedira (L Bender 88), Kroos (Gotze 86), Muller (Reus 83), Ozil, Podolski (Schurrle 67), Gomez (Klose 67).
Israel: Harosh - Shpungin, Tibi, Ben Haim, Gershon, Natcho (Biton 73), Yadin (Tzedek 88), Benayoun (Vermouth 46), Zahavi (Sahar 67), Melikson (Refaelov 46), Shechter (Damari 46).

May 31 - Kufstein, Austria
Greece 1 (K Papadopoulos 23)
Armenia 0
HT: 1-0
Greece: Sifakis - Holebas (Tzavellas 60), K Papadopoulos, A Papadopoulos, Papastathopoulos (Makos 60), Maniatis, Katsouranis, Karagounis (Fotakis 46), Fortounis (Samaras 46), Salpigidis (Mitroglou 85), Gekas (Fetfatzidis 60).
Armenia: Berezovsky - Hovsepyan, Arzumanyan (Mkoyan 78), V Aleksanyan, Hayrapetyan, K Mkrtchyan, Henrikh Mkhitaryan, G Ghazaryan (Sarkisov 88), Manoyan (Badoyan 59), Pizzelli (Artur Yedigaryan 73), Movsisyan.

May 31 - Chicago, USA
Mexico 2 (G Dos Santos 6, J Hernandez 90+2)
Bosnia-Herzegovina 1 (Dzeko 29)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 51,240. **Ref:** Jurisevic (USA)
Mexico: G Ochoa - F Rodriguez, Salcido, Meza, Ayala, Torres Nilo, Andrade (Guardado 59), G Dos Santos (J Hernandez 60), Zavala, Barrera (Lugo 77), De Nigris (Reyna 72).
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Begovic - Pandza, Mujdza, Rahimic (Vranjes 68), Jahic, Pjanic (Alispahic 89), Misimovic (Svraka 68), Lulic, Medunjanin (Vrancic 86), Ibisevic (Ibricic 68), Dzeko.

Friday, June 1

June 1 - Innsbruck
Austria 3 (Junuzovic 3, Arnautovic 62, 89)
Ukraine 2 (Husiev 56, 65)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 13,000. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)
Austria: Lindner - Klein (Garics 28), Prodl, Scharner, Suttner, Arnautovic, Baumgartlinger (Kavlak 68), Alaba (Pehlivan 82), Ivanschitz (Burgstaller 75), Junuzovic, Janko (Burger 63).
Ukraine: Horyainov (Koval 46) - Husiev, Khacheridi, Mykhalyk, Rakytskyi, Tymoshchuk, Yarmolenko, Nazarenko (Rotan 63), Konoplyanka (Butko 59), Voronin (Shevchenko 46), Devych (Milevskyi 46).

June 1 - Prague
Czech Republic 1 (Kadlec pen 25)
Hungary 2 (Dzsudzsak 6, Gyurcso 89)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 17,102. **Ref:** Probert (Eng)
Czech Republic: Cech - Gebre Selassie, Kadlec, Sivok (Hubnik 46), Limbersky, Pilar, Kolar (Darida 61), Rezek (Rajtoral 72), Jiracek (Hubschman 79), Plasil (Lafata 79), Baros (Pekhart 61).
Hungary: Bogdan - Vanczak (Halmosi 83), Korcsmar, Juhasz (Meszaros 39), Laczko, Varga, Pinter, Koltai (Gyurcso 65), Szakaly (Nemeth 89), Dzsudzsak (Debreceni 90+2), Szalai (Szabics 69).

June 1 - Guatemala City
Guatemala 1 (Ruiz 26)
Costa Rica 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Castro (Hnd)
Guatemala: Jerez - Morales, Vasquez, Gallardo, L Rodriguez, Velasquez, Galindo (Del Aguila 80), Pappa (Romero 77), J Lopez, M Rodriguez (Arreola 65), Ruiz (M Lopez 89).
Costa Rica: Navas - Mora (N Monge 58), Miller, Umana, Oviedo, Barrantes (Castillo 77), Cubero, Rojas (Borges 46), Brenes (Sanchez 74), Scott, Campbell (Wallace 63).

June 1 - Hong Kong
Hong Kong 1 (Lam Ka-wai 36)
Singapore 0
HT: 1-0

June 1 - Zurich, Switzerland
Italy 0
Russia 3 (Kerzhakov 60, Shirokov 75, 89)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 19,032. **Ref:** Hanni (Swi)
Italy: Buffon (De Sanctis 46) - Maggio, Barzagli, Bonucci, Balzaretti (Ogbonna 53), De Rossi (Nocerino 61), Pirlo (Di Natale 68), Marchisio, Montolivo (Thiago Motta 61), Balotelli, Cassano (Giovinco 68).
Russia: Malafeev (Akinfeev 46) - Nababkin, A Berezutsky, Ignashevich, Zhirkov (Kombarov 87), Denisov, Dzagoev (Kokorin 85), Zyryanov, Shirokov, Arshavin, Kerzhakov (Pavlyuchenko 62).

June 1 - Almaty
Kazakhstan 5 (Logvinenko 4, Tazhimbetov 13, 32, 90, Nurdauletov pen 57)
Kyrgyzstan 2 (Baimatov 27, Sharipov 34)
HT: 3-2. **Att:** 14,000. **Ref:** Talibzhanov (Uzb)
Kazakhstan: Bekbayev (Tsirin 46) - Engel (Gorman 83), Mukhtarov, Logvinenko (Rozhkov 46), Kirov, Nurdauletov (Shakhmetov 68), Islamkhan, Dzholchiyev (Kukeyev 62), Schmidtgal, Tazhimbetov, Khiznichenko (Ostapenko 21).

June 1 - Shah Alam
Malaysia 0
Philippines 0

June 1 - Panama City
Panama 2 (B Perez 34, Renteria 76)
Jamaica 1 (Richards 43)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 10,500. **Ref:** Cerdas (CR)
Panama: Penedo - R Torres, Baloy, Jean Cedeno, Dios Perez (Godoy 90), L Henriquez (C Rodriguez 52), Quintero (Haywood 81), Yau (Renteria 56), A Henriquez (Barahona 72), Cooper, B Perez (Aguilar 86).
Jamaica: Ricketts - Virgo (Humphrey 85), Damion Stewart, C Davis, Phillips, Watson (K Daley 85), R Reid, Austin, Richards (Mariappa 85), Fuller (King 46), R Johnson (Shelton 46).

June 1 - Bayamon
Puerto Rico 3 (Arrieta 39, Cabrero 63, Hansen 84)
Nicaragua 1 (Barrera 90)
HT: 1-0

Saturday, June 2

June 2 - Copenhagen
Denmark 2 (Agger pen 32, Bjelland 68)
Australia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 15,888. **Ref:** Damato (Ita)
Denmark: Andersen - Jacobsen, Kjaer (Bjelland 46), Agger (Okore 63), S Poulsen (Wass 74), Kvist (J Poulsen 81), Zimling, Rommedahl, Eriksen (Kahlenberg 46), Krohn-Dehli (Mikkelsen 74), Bendtner.
Australia: Schwarzer - North, Spiranovic, Neill, Jedinak (Milligan 66), Wilkshire (Kruse 69), Bresciano (Kilkenny 74), McKay, Kewell (Cahill 69), Brosque, Thompson (Carney 66).

June 2 - Washington DC, USA
El Salvador 0
Honduras 3 (Bernardez 11, Costly 50, Lalin 84)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Salazar (USA)
El Salvador: Villalobos - Garcia, Purdy, Turcios, Pacheco (Monteagudo 81), D Alas, J Alas (E Sanchez 81), Ceren (Quintanilla 46), Romero (R Sanchez 65), Bonilla (Blanco 46), Burgos (Gutierrez 57).
Honduras: N Valladares - Sabillon (Beckeles 79), Bernardez, Leveron, Figueroa, O Garcia, W Palacios (Espinoza 65), Delgado, Izaguirre (Discua 86), Johnson (C Mejia 46), Costly (Lalin 73).
Sent off: Beckeles 83min.

TAHITI

Family affair

The three Tehau brothers – Alvin, Jonathan and Lorenzo – and their cousin, Teaonui, were all on the scoresheet in Tahiti's 10-1 thrashing of Samoa in the OFC Nations Cup – a competition which doubles up as the second round of Oceania's World Cup qualifying campaign.

Dream start...Harbaoui

TUNISIA

Perfect beginning

Hamdi Harbaoui, a striker with Belgian club Lokeren, scored on his international debut in the 5-1 friendly win against Rwanda.

ZAMBIA

Mixed fortunes

The African Nations Cup champions began the World Cup qualifying campaign with mixed fortunes.

They lost their opening game 2-0 away to Sudan, but four days later a goal from captain Christopher Katongo secured a 1-0 win at home to Ghana, the team they beat in the Nations Cup semi-finals by the same scoreline. It was Zambia's first game at the new 40,000-seat Levy Mwanawasa Stadium.

Goal scorer...Katongo

June 2 - London
England 1 (Welbeck 36)
Belgium 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 85,091. **Ref:** Rasmussen (Den)
England: Hart - G Johnson, Cahill (Lescott 19), Terry (Jagielka 70), Cole, Milner, Gerrard (Henderson 83), Parker, Oxlade-Chamberlain (Walcott 66), Young (Defoe 66), Welbeck (Rooney 53).
Belgium: Mignolet - G Gillet, Simons, Vermaelen, Vertonghen, Dembele, Fellaini, Witsel, Hazard, Mertens (Lukaku 72), Mirallas (Chadli 59).

June 2 - Amsterdam
Holland 6 (Van Persie 11, pen 29, Sneijder 15, Afellay 37, 51, Vlaar 78)
Northern Ireland 0
HT: 4-0. **Att:** 50,000. **Ref:** Schorgenhofer (Aut)
Holland: Stekelenburg - Van der Wiel, Heitinga, Vlaar, Willems (Schaars 78), N De Jong, Van Bommel (Van der Vaart 57), Robben (Narsingh 82), Sneijder (Kuyt 70), Afellay, Van Persie (Huntelaar 57).
Northern Ireland: Camp (Carroll 46) - Hodson, Duff (McArdle 63), McPake, Lafferty (McGivern 46), Little (McGinn 56), Clingan, McCann (Carson 46), Norwood, Ferguson (Healy 82), Grigg.

June 2 - Luxembourg
Luxembourg 0
Malta 2 (M Mifsud 12, 81)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 1,054. **Ref:** Hameter (Aut)
Luxembourg: Joubert - Schnell, Blaise (Hoffmann 34), Philipps (Laterza 80), Collette (Janisch 81), C Leweck (Deville 53), Payal, Mutsch, Gerson (Bettmer 46), Bensi (Da Mota 46), Joachim.
Sent off: Mutsch 44min.
Malta: Hogg - Failla, A Agius (Zerafa 74), J Caruana, A Muscat (Borg 46), Bogdanovic, Cohen, Sciberras (P Fenech 46), Briffa, Schembri (E Agius 81), M Mifsud.

June 2 - Oslo
Norway 1 (Elyounoussi 90+2)
Croatia 1 (Eduardo 80)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 14,206. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)
Norway: Jarstein (Pettersen 46) - Ruud, Demidov (Madsen 46), Hangeland, J A Riise, Elyounoussi, Henriksen (Grindheim 71), Tettey (Berisha 73), Jenssen, Huseklepp (Soderlund 84), Braaten.
Croatia: Pletikosa - Vida, Simunic, Schildenfeld, Strinic (Pranjic 46), Srna, Dujmovic (Vukojevic 46), Perisic (Kranjcar 63), Rakitic, Jelavic (Olic 46; Ilicevic 71), Mandzukic (Eduardo 63).

June 2 - Warsaw
Poland 4 (Obraniak 13, Lewandowski 37, Blaszczykowski pen 39, Wasilewski pen 77)
Andorra 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 27,000. **Ref:** Delferiere (Blg)
Poland: Szczesny - Piszczek (Wojtkowiak 46), Wasilewski, Perquis, Boenisch, Polanski (Grosicki 79), Murawski (Dudka 58), Blaszczykowski, Obraniak (Mierzejewski 58), Rybus (Wolski 46), Lewandowski (Sobiech 58).
Andorra: J Gomez – A Martinez (Rodriguez 55), E Garcia, I Lima, Bernaus (M Garcia 62), C Martinez (Moreira 73), Ayala, Vieira, Peppe (Andorra 81), Moreno (Jimenez 84), S Gomez (Silva 55).

June 2 - Lisbon
Portugal 1 (Nani 57)
Turkey 3 (Umut 35, 52, Pepe og 88)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Studer (Swi)
Portugal: Rui Patricio (Eduardo 73) - Miguel Lopes (Ricardo Quaresma 86), Pepe, Bruno Alves (Ricardo Costa 69), Fabio Coentrao, Joao Moutinho, Miguel Veloso (Custodio 69), Raul Meireles (Helder Postiga 86), Nani, Hugo Almeida (Nelson Oliveira 73), Cristiano Ronaldo.
Turkey: Volkan Demirel - Hasan Ali, Bekir, Omer, Hamit Altintop, Emre Belozoglu (Nuri 72), Mehmet Topal (Engin 90), Sercan (Selcuk Inan 72), Arda (Caner 81), Umut (Mustafa 90), Burak (Tunay 61).

Sunday, June 3

June 3 - Toronto
Canada 0
United States 0
Att: 15,247. **Ref:** Morales (Mex)
Canada: Hirschfeld - Edgar, McKenna, Hainault, Jazic (Klukowski 88), Ricketts (Hume 86), Ledgerwood (Pacheco 73), De Guzman (Piette 86), Johnson, De Rosario, Occean (Jackson 65).
United States: Howard - Cherundolo (Parkhurst 80), Goodson, Bocanegra (Onyewu 62), Castillo, Bradley, Jones, Donovan (Edu 73), Torres (Altidore 62), Dempsey, Gomez (Wondolowski 80).

June 3 - Arlington, USA
Mexico 2 (G Dos Santos 22, J Hernandez pen 33)
Brazil 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 84,519. **Ref:** Petrescu (Can)
Mexico: Corona - F Rodriguez, Salcido, Meza (Jimenez 88), Moreno, Guardado (Reyna 84), Zavala, Barrera (Andrade 68), Torres Nilo, G Dos Santos (De Nigris 55), J Hernandez (Lugo 77).
Brazil: Rafael Cabral - Danilo, Thiago Silva (Bruno Uvini 69), Juan, Marcelo, Romulo, Sandro (Lucas Silva 61), Oscar (Casemiro 83), Hulk (Wellington Nem 77), Leandro Damiao (Alexandre Pato 61), Neymar.

June 3 - Bayamon
Puerto Rico 1 (Hansen 61)
Nicaragua 1 (Pavon 80)
HT: 0-0

June 3 - Seville
Spain 1 (Silva 85)
China 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 45,000. **Ref:** Nijhuis (Hol)
Spain: Casillas (Valdes 46) - Arbeloa, Albiol, Sergio Ramos (Pique 55), Jordi Alba, Xavi (Jesus Navas 46), Busquets (Iniesta 46), Xabi Alonso, Silva, Negredo (Fernando Torres 46), Cazorla (Mata 71).
China: Zeng Cheng - Zhang Linpeng, Feng Xiaoting, Zhao Peng, Sun Xiang, Zhao Xuri (Lu Peng 70), Qin Sheng (Liu Jianye 84), Hao Junmin (Wang Xiaolong 59), Zheng Zhi (Liu Jian 64), Yu Hai (Zheng Zheng 74), Gao Lin (Yu Dabao 87).

Monday, June 4

June 4 - Budapest
Hungary 0
Republic of Ireland 0
Att: 17,000. **Ref:** Hansen (Den)
Hungary: Bogdan - Varga, Meszaros, Gyurcso (Koltai 86), Korcsmar, Halmosi (Kadar 70), Pinter (Vanczak 46), Koman, Dzsudzsak, Szakaly (Szabics 66), Szalai (Nemeth 78).
Rep Ireland: Given (Westwood 46) - O'Shea, Dunne, St Ledger, Ward, Duff (S Hunt 63), Whelan (Green 84), Andrews (Gibson 65), McGeady, Keane (Cox 60), Doyle (Walters 46).

Tuesday, June 5

June 5 - Yerevan
Armenia 3 (G Ghazaryan 6, 37, Movsisyan 41)
Kazakhstan 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Kvaratskhelia (Geo)
Armenia: Kasparov - Hovsepyan (Hovhannisyan 80), Arzumanyan, V Aleksanyan, Artak Yedigaryan, K Mkrtchyan (Manoyan 46), G Ghazaryan, Henrikh Mkhitaryan, Hayrapetyan (Sarkisov 46), Pizzelli (Artur Yedigaryan 62), Movsisyan (Badoyan 87).
Kazakhstan: Sidelnikov - Kirov, Rozhkov, Mukhtarov (Gorman 46), Engel (Kurgulin 86), Nurdauletov, Islamkhan (Shakhmetov 57), Konysbayev (Nuserbayev 52), Schmidtgal, Ostapenko (Gridin 70), Dzholchiyev (Tazhimbetov 57).

June 5 - Innsbruck
Austria 0
Romania 0
Att: 12,500. **Ref:** Makkelie (Hol)
Austria: Gratzei - Garics, Scharner, Dragovic, Suttner, Kavlak, Alaba (Baumgartlinger 88), Arnautovic (Pehlivan 85), Junuzovic (Ivanschitz 71), Burgstaller (Sabitzer 65), Janko (Burger 46).
Romania: Tatarusanu - Papp, Gaman, Chiriches (Bourceanu 71), Rat, Florescu (Lazar 59), Golan, Torje (Maxim 85), Grozav (Alexe 62), Tanase (Chipciu 78), D Niculae (Gardos 90+2).

June 5 - Le Mans
France 4 (Ribery 25, Benzema 36, 47, Menez 90+1)
Estonia 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 23,500. **Ref:** Liany (Isr)
France: Lloris - Debuchy, Rami, Mexes, Evra, Cabaye (Valbuena 52), A Diarra (Koscielny 65), Malouda (Giroud 72), Nasri (Ben Arfa 72), Ribery (Martin 65), Benzema (Menez 72).
Estonia: Pareiko - Enar Jaager, Klavan, Rahn, Teniste (Kruglov 46), Dmitrijev, Ojamaa (Saag 61), Vassiljev, Kink (Purje 68), S Puri, Oper (Voskoboinikov 67).

June 5 - Manila
Philippines 2 (J Younghusband 59, P Younghusband 83)
Indonesia 2 (Wanggai 56, Bachdim 61)
HT: 0-0
Sent off: Caligdong 80min, Ott 80min (both Philippines); Bachdim (Indonesia) 80min

June 5 - Stockholm
Sweden 2 (Toivonen 23, Ibrahimovic pen 52)
Serbia 1 (Subotic 27)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 20,691. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Sweden: Isaksson (Wiland 71) - Lustig (J Olsson 74), Mellberg, Granqvist, M Olsson, A Svensson (Holmen 87), Kallstrom, S Larsson (Wilhelmsson 87), Ibrahimovic (Wernbloom 81), R Elm, Toivonen (Hysen 55).
Serbia: Aleksic (Kahrman 46) - Z Tosic, Lekic (Scepovic 46), Petrovic, Lukovic, Obradovic (Kolarov 76), Ignjovski (Matic 63), Maksimovic, Subotic, Lazovic, Tomic.

June 5 - Ingolstadt, Germany
Turkey 2 (Caner 30, Mustafa 70)
Ukraine 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Weiner (Ger)
Turkey: Mert - Semih (Omer 32), Egemen (Emre Belozoglu 78), Hamit Altintop, Nuri, Gokhan Tore (Engin 84), Hasan Ali, Arda (Tunay 66), Mehmet Topal, Mustafa (Umut 80), Caner (Sercan 66).
Ukraine: Pyatov - Butko (Husiev 64), Kucher (Khacheridi 46), Rakytskyi, Shevchuk, Harmash (Nazarenko 46), Rotan, Konoplyanka, Aliyev (Shevchenko 46), Devych, Milevskyi (Seleznyov 67).

Thursday, June 7

June 7 - Minsk
Belarus 1 (Dragun 79)
Lithuania 1 (Radavicius 43)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Satchi (Mol)
Belarus: Zhevnov - Veratsilo, Radkov (Martynovich 75), Filipenko, Bordachev, Kulchy (Dragun 46), Pavlov (Sitko 46), Stasevich (Kislyak 60), Bressan, Balanovich (Nekhaychik 60), Mozolevski (Komarovski 46).
Lithuania: Klevinskas - Mikuckis, Kijanskas, Andriuskevicius, Borovskij (Freidgeimas 56), Radavicius (Kuklys 77), Panka, Pilibaitis (Vicius 82), Papsys (Vaitkunas 68), Luksa (Jankauskas 90+4), Velicka (Matulevicius 87).

Friday, June 8

June 8 - Wuhan
China 3 (Gao Lin 10, 64, Feng Renliang 34)
Vietnam 0
HT: 2-0

June 8 - Singapore
Singapore 2 (Sulaiman 87, Qiu Li 90+3)
Malaysia 2 (Akil 42, Rahim 59)
HT: 0-1

Saturday, June 9

June 9 - East Rutherford, USA
Argentina 4 (Messi 31, 34, 84, Fernandez 75)
Brazil 3 (Romulo 23, Oscar 56, Hulk 72)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 81,994. **Ref:** Marrufo (Mex)
Argentina: Romero - Zabaleta, Fernandez, Garay, C Rodriguez (Campagnaro 89), Sosa (Guinazu 58), Gago, Mascherano, Di Maria (Aguero 74), Messi, Higuain (Lavezzi 89). *Sent off: Lavezzi 90+1min.*
Brazil: Rafael Cabral - Rafael (Danilo 79), Bruno Uvini, Juan, Marcelo, Sandro, Romulo (Casemiro 74), Oscar (Giuliano 59), Hulk (Lucas Silva 83), Leandro Damiao (Alexandre Pato 67), Neymar.
Sent off: Marcelo 90+1min.

June 9 - Cayenne
French Guiana 2 (Contout 15, Cleberson 54)
Surinam 1 (Waal 80)
HT: 1-0

Sunday, June 10

June 10 - Hong Kong
Hong Kong 1 (Au Yeung Yiu Chung 40)
Vietnam 2 (Nguyen Van Quyet 71, Nguyen Trong Hoang 74)
HT: 1-0

Tuesday, June 12

June 12 - Shah Alam
Malaysia 2 (Ali 18, Rahim 61)
Singapore 0
HT: 1-0

June 12 - Bacolod
Philippines 3 (Guirado 8, 45+2, De Murga 12)
Guam 0
HT: 3-0

Friday, June 15

June 15 - Nelspruit
South Africa 3 (Tshabalala 42, Rantie 68, Mashaba 75)
Gabon 0
HT: 1-0
South Africa: Khune - Gaxa, Masenamela (Jali 77), Mathoho, Gould (Xulu 80), Modise (Mashaba 60), Tshabalala (Majoro 80), Letsholonyane, Mahlangu, Mokoena (Serero 47), Rantie (Nomvete 72).

Monday, June 18

June 18 - Sana'a
Yemen 1 (Sadeq 43)
Palestine 2 (Nu'man 36, Amour 90+1)
HT: 1-1

LIBERTADORES CUP
Big two in Final showdown

Playmaker...Boca's Riquelme (in yellow) caused Universidad de Chile plenty of problems in the second leg of their semi-final

For the 13th time in its 53-year history, the Libertadores Cup Final was set to be contested by teams from Argentina and Brazil, with six-times champions Boca Juniors taking on Corinthians. Astonishingly, the Brazilians were set to make their debut in the finale.

The two giants – one from Buenos Aires, the other from Sao Paulo – made it through from a strong last eight in which parity between the teams was revealed by the fact that, in all the quarter-final and semi-final games, on only one occasion did a team manage to score more than once.

That was when Boca won 2-0 at home to Universidad de Chile in the first leg of their semi.

In a year-and-a-half under coach Jorge Sampaoli, the Chilean club have displayed a pleasing commitment to attack, with a high-intensity, pass-and-move game that has made them the most attractive side on the continent. But in comparison with the side that won last year's Sudamericana Cup, the 2012 model has looked vulnerable defensively, with more space between the lines allowing opponents to play around their back three.

Boca coach Julio Cesar Falcioni selected little striker Pablo Mouche to take advantage of this weakness. In Buenos Aires his side stayed deep and compact, blocking the passing game of the visitors and springing Mouche down the left to set up a goal for centre-forward Santiago Silva. Boca's second came down the same channel, with Juan Roman Riquelme and Silva opening up the defence, and Juan Sanchez Mino scoring after Walter Erviti's shot had been saved.

The return in Santiago was a pulsating affair that somehow stayed goalless. Chasing a two-goal deficit, the hosts threw everything forward – as shown by the 15-3 corner count in their favour. Marcelo Diaz rattled the Boca bar with a free-kick, as did underused sub Raul Ruidiaz with a looping shot. But the clearest chances were probably at the other end, where Riquelme exposed a high defensive line – switched to a back four for this game – to set up a succession of chances which were wasted by Mouche, before he himself hit the bar with a side-footed volley.

While Boca had no cause to regret those missed chances, they will need greater accuracy in the two-legged showdown with a Corinthians side who arrive in the Final having conceded just three goals in 12 games.

Santos blunder

In the other semi-final, reigning champions Santos blundered by electing to play their home leg against local rivals Corinthians at their small Vila Belmiro stadium. A team with their characteristics need space for the likes of Neymar and Paulo Henrique Ganso to impose their individual talent and a small pitch eased the vistors' task.

With centre-forward Liedson's appearances limited by injuries, Corinthians coach Tite has been operating with a system best described as 4-2-4-0. Nominally, the strikers Emerson and Jorge Henrique operate out wide and track the opposing full-backs. Attacking midfielders Danilo and Alex provide touches of quality and also work back, while Ralf protects the defence and Paulinho plays an interesting shuttle role. The team stays compact and are very difficult to play through.

In the first leg Corinthians played a high line, and Alex and Paulinho combined to set up Emerson, who curled an excellent shot into the far top corner for the only goal of the game.

However, the goalscorer was

Seeing red...referee Jose Buitrago sends off Fluminense's Carlinhos (right) against Boca

sent off in the second half and his pace was badly missed in the second leg. Corinthians were dangerously cautious and paid the price for their negative approach. Ten minutes before half-time, Neymar got free and he fed Alan Kardec down the right. His low cross was turned against the far post by striker Borges and Neymar, who had continued his run, tapped in from close range.

The advantage seemed to be with Santos, but two minutes after the break they fell asleep at a free-kick and Danilo was left free at the far post to equalise. Santos never seriously threatened to score again and the mood on the Sao Paulo terraces turned from nervousness to celebration as Corinthians at last booked their place in a Libertadores Final.

Santos' limitations had been apparent a round earlier when they needed penalties to get past Velez Sarsfield. In his competitive debut against an Argentinian club, Neymar never looked happy facing a side that squeezed his space with a tight 4-4-2. Velez were clearly on top in the first leg in Buenos Aires, but were happy to settle for the one-goal advantage supplied by Mauro Obolo's glancing header. However, their pressing came unstuck in the return and Ganso's ball over the top for Neymar drew a red card for goalkeeper Marcelo Barovero before half-time, leaving Velez with little option but to hang on and hope. They were breached once – Alan Kardec scoring 13 minutes from time – and then lost the penalty shoot-out.

Two 1-1 draws meant that the quarter-final between Universidad de Chile and Libertad of Paraguay also went to penalties. A superb Diaz free-kick – waiting for the wall to jump before slipping the ball under them – put the Chileans ahead in the second leg, but for all the fluency of their passing they were often uncomfortable against the aerial strength of their opponents, who also exposed the defensive problems down the right which Boca were to exploit. Goalkeeper Johnny Herrera was *La U*'s hero, making a superb stop from Rodolfo Gamarra in stoppage time and then blocking Victor Ayala's shot in the shoot-out.

Watchful...Corinthians' skipper Alessandro (left) sticks close to Neymar of Santos in their semi-final, first-leg clash

Riquelme probing

In front of their own fans, Boca might have pressed home their first-leg advantage over Fluminense in the quarter-final. The Brazilians were missing Fred and Deco, their two players of genuine quality, and had left-back Carlinhos sent off just after the half hour. After Mouche put them ahead Boca seemed content – a decision which looked unwise in Rio a week later when Thiago Carleto's deflected free-kick levelled the aggregate scores. However, still without Fred and Deco, Fluminense could not find a second. Boca bided their time, Riquelme probing for weaknesses, and with a shoot-out just seconds away he slipped Diego Rivero down the right for a shot that cannoned back off the far post for Silva to tap in the rebound.

The all-Brazilian Vasco da Gama-Corinthians tie was even tighter. A goalless draw in Rio was followed by 87 scoreless minutes in Sao Paulo, with tension rising all the time as the crowd fretted at the possibility of a Vasco away goal. It so nearly came when Corinthians right-back Alessandro had a clearance charged down by Diego Souza, who then bore down on goal. But when he placed a side-foot shot to the keeper's left, the giant Cassio got enough of a glove on the ball to send it round the post.

With three minutes to go Paulinho met a corner from the left with a header into the far corner, but even then Corinthians were not safe. Vasco forced a free-kick wide on the right which Juninho curled in, Cassio came out badly, but Romulo twisted his neck a fraction too much and sent his header just past the far post.

On such margins Libertadores Cups are won and lost.

Tim Vickery

OFC NATIONS CUP
Red faces for All Whites

Photo: www.phototec.co.nz

Victorious...Tahiti's players and backroom staff perform a haka-type celebration after their Final against New Caledonia at the Lawson Tama Stadium in the Solomon Islands

Despite Tahiti's historic triumph, the 2012 Oceania Nations Cup will be remembered primarily for amateurs New Caledonia eliminating a New Zealand team of full time professionals in the semi-finals.

The All Whites line-up included eight players who appeared in that extraordinary World Cup draw against Italy two years ago, but badly missed Premier League defenders Winston Reid and Ryan Nelsen. New Caledonia's goals in a famous 2-0 victory, by Bertrand Kai and Georges Gope-Fenepej, both came from slack marking.

Unfortunately for *Les Cagous*, who are coached by former France midfielder Alain Moizan, they failed to convert several other clear-cut scoring opportunities in the Final 48 hours later.

The Tahitians, with player of the tournament Nicolas Vallar inspirational at the back, created fewer chances but deserved success with their solitary goal coming from the game's one moment of genuine quality.

After 11 minutes, Lorenzo Tehau turned cleverly and clipped a superb cross onto the head of his brother Jonathan, who located Steevy Chong Hue lurking in space in the penalty area. He instantly killed the ball before driving it into the net from a difficult angle.

Kiwis struggling

Playing their fifth game in 10 days, New Zealand again struggled with the 34 degree heat and Lawson Tama Stadium's bumpy surface when they faced hosts Solomon Islands in the third-place play-off. They squandered a 3-0 half-time lead and then had to rely on Shane Smeltz to score a winner in stoppage time.

All four semi-finalists gained berths for the next phase of their Confederation's World Cup qualifying schedule.

The ever-improving Papua New Guinea - under the wing of ex-Australia coach Frank Farina - and Fiji will consider themselves slightly unlucky not to have qualified. However, Vanuatu – who travelled to Honiara immediately after a long domestic season – disappointed and Samoa were outclassed, as the 24 goals they let in testifies.

Tahiti are the first country other than Australia or New Zealand to claim the Oceania crown, with the Antipodeans having divided the previous eight editions equally between them. The Pacific minnows will now represent Oceania in next year's Confederations Cup in Brazil.

Only once before have Tahiti been represented at a FIFA tournament. The 2009 World Under-20 Championship in Egypt saw the French Polynesians concede 21 unanswered goals during three games – with six of the current senior squad sharing that unhappy experience.

An embarrassment of equal proportions in 2013 would jeopardise the hard-won credibility New Zealand garnered for the continent at South Africa 2010.

A great challenge lies ahead.

Paul Moon

Photo: www.phototec.co.nz

Out...New Zealand's Ivan Vicelich (left) and Chris Killen are beaten by New Caledonia

ICELAND

Goalscoring record

IBV Vestmannaeyjar forward Tryggvi Gudmundsson broke the country's top-flight scoring record, overhauling Ingi Bjorn Albertsson's total of 126 with a goal in the 4-1 win against Stjarnan. The 38-year-old equalled Albertsson's mark last year, but after suffering an embolism he subsequently missed the opening five games of this season.

"I have plenty left to give and have no plans to quit just yet," says Gudmundsson.

ITALY

Samp in Serie A

Sampdoria clinched a return to the top flight after an absence of just one season, beating Varese 4-2 on aggregate in the Serie B promotion play-off.

Atalanta and Pescara will both start the Serie A season with two-point penalties for their role in the ongoing "Calcioscommesse" match-fixing scandal.

SAN MARINO

Maiden championship

Tre Penne won the league title for the first time in their history, beating Libertas 1-0 in the Final. Matteo Valli scored a late goal to clinch the title for Tre Penne, who had lost in the previous two finals.

Champions...Tre Penne

WALES

The end for Neath

Neath, who finished third in the Welsh Premier League last season, were expelled from the league and wound up in the High Court.

Club Results

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st qualifying round draw

F91 Dudelange (Lux) v Tre Penne (SMa)
Linfield (Nir) v B36 (Far)
Valletta (Mlt) v Lusitans (And)
1st legs - July 3/4; 2nd legs - July 10/11

2nd qualifying round draw

AEL (Cyp) v *Linfield OR B36*
BATE Borisov (Bls) v Vardar (Mac)
Buducnost (Mne) v Slask Wroclaw (Pol)
F91 Dudelange OR Tre Penne v Salzburg (Aut)
Flora Tallinn (Est) v Basle (Swi)
HJK Helsinki (Fin) v KR (Ice)
Ludogorets (Bul) v Dinamo Zagreb (Cro)
Maribor (Sln) v Zeljeznicar (Bos)
Molde (Nor) v Ventspils (Lat)
Neftchi (Aze) v Zestafoni (Geo)
The New Saints (Wal) v Helsingborg (Swe)
Shamrock Rovers (Rlr) v Ekranas (Lit)
Skenderbeu (Alb) v Debrecen (Hun)
Slovan Liberec (Cze) v Shakhter Karagandy (Kaz)
Ulisses (Arm) v Sheriff (Mol)
Valletta OR Lusitans v Partizan Belgrade (Ser)
Zilina (Slk) v Kiryat Shmona (Isr)
1st legs - July 17/18; 2nd legs - July 24/25

3rd qualifying round

Direct entrants
Anderlecht (Blg), Celtic (Sco), CFR Cluj (Rom), Club Brugge (Blg), Copenhagen (Den), Dynamo Kiev (Ukr), Fenerbahce (Tur), Feyenoord (Hol), Motherwell (Sco), Panathinaikos (Gre), Vaslui (Rom)
1st legs - July 31/Aug 1; 2nd legs - Aug 7/8

4th qualifying round

Direct entrants
Braga (Por), Lille (Fra), Malaga (Spa), Monchengladbach (Ger), Spartak Moscow (Rus), Udinese (Ita)
1st legs - Aug 21/22; 2nd legs - Aug 28/29

Group stage

Direct entrants
Ajax (Hol), Arsenal (Eng), Barcelona (Spa), Bayern Munich (Ger), Benfica (Por), Borussia Dortmund (Ger), Chelsea (Eng), Galatasaray (Tur), Juventus (Ita), Manchester City (Eng), Manchester Utd (Eng), Milan (Ita), Montpellier (Fra), Nordsjaelland (Den), Olympiakos (Gre), Paris Saint-Germain (Fra), Porto (Por), Real Madrid (Spa), Schalke (Ger), Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr), Valencia (Spa), Zenit St Petersburg (Rus)
Matchdays: Sep 18/19, Oct 2/3, Oct 23/24, Nov 6/7, Nov 20/21, Dec 4/5

SETANTA CUP

Final

May 12 - Belfast (The Oval)
Crusaders (Nir) 2 (Coates 85, 96)
Derry City (Nir) 2 (Patterson 80, pen 101)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 1-1. **Att:** 3,275.
Ref: Crangle (Nir)
Crusaders 5-4 on pens
Sent off: McBride (Crusaders) 90+2min

NORWAY

May 29: Fredrikstad 3 Viking 0.
June 24: Valerenga 1 Stabaek 2; Rosenborg 3 Stromsgodset 3; Aalesund 2 Sogndal 2.

NORWAY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Stromsgodset	12	8	2	2	24	16	26
Molde	12	8	1	3	23	13	25
Haugesund	12	6	5	1	21	11	23
Tromso	12	6	3	3	21	13	21
Rosenborg	12	4	7	1	19	12	19
Honefoss	12	4	6	2	11	9	18
Aalesund	12	3	6	3	16	16	15
Valerenga	11	4	2	5	13	16	14
Sogndal	12	3	5	4	12	15	14
Sandnes Ulf	12	3	5	4	15	20	14
Viking	12	4	2	6	9	17	14
Brann	12	4	1	7	19	19	13
Odd Grenland	11	3	4	4	14	14	13
Lillestrom	12	2	5	5	13	19	11
Fredrikstad	12	2	3	7	18	20	9
Stabaek	12	2	1	9	9	27	7

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

June 1: Dundalk 1 Drogheda 2; Bohemians 0 Sligo 0; Bray 3 UCD 1; Derry 0 Shelbourne 1; Shamrock 1 Cork 1.
June 21: Shelbourne 2 Shamrock 3.
June 22: Cork 2 Derry 2; Drogheda 3 Bray 1; St Patrick's 2 Bohemians 1; UCD 1 Dundalk 1.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sligo	13	8	4	1	21	7	28
St Patrick's	13	6	6	1	20	9	24
Shamrock	13	6	5	2	28	19	23
Drogheda	14	6	5	3	23	18	23
Derry	14	5	4	5	17	15	19
Shelbourne	14	5	3	6	15	20	18
Cork	14	3	6	5	17	19	15
Bohemians	14	4	3	7	11	15	15
Bray	14	4	3	7	23	29	15
Dundalk	13	3	3	7	10	24	12
UCD	14	2	4	8	14	24	10

30-round season (10x3); bottom team will enter rel/prom play-off
**Monaghan withdrew from the league after 14 games; their results have been expunged*

SAN MARINO

Championship Final

May 29 - Serravalle (Olimpico)
Libertas 0
Tre Penne 1 (Valli 78)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 800. **Ref:** Casanova

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs

June 13
Santos (Bra) 0
Corinthians (Bra) 1 (Emerson Sheik 28)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** De Lima Henrique (Bra)
Santos: Rafael - Henrique, Edu Dracena, Durval, Juan, Adriano, Arouca (Felipe Anderson 81), Elano (Borges 46), Ganso, Neymar, Alan Kardec (Dimba 90+18).
Corinthians: Cassio - Alessandro, Chicao, Leandro Castan, Fabio Santos, Ralf, Paulinho, Danilo, Alex (Wallace 90+10), Jorge Henrique, Emerson Sheik.
Sent off: Emerson Sheik 77min.

June 14
Boca Juniors (Arg) 2 (Silva 15, Sanchez Mino 55)
Universidad de Chile (Chl) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Boca: Orion - Roncaglia, Schiavi, Insaurralde, Sanchez Mino, Ledesma (Chavez 78), Somoza, Erviti, Riquelme, Mouche (Cvitanich 81), Silva.
Universidad: Herrera - Gonzalez, Acevedo, Rojas, Rodriguez (Magalhaes 57), Aranguiz, Diaz, Mena, Lorenzetti (Ruidiaz 81), Henriquez (Ubilla 73), Fernandes.

2nd legs

June 20
Corinthians 1 (Danilo 48)
Santos 1 (Neymar 36)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Vuaden (Bra)
Corinthians 2-1 on agg
Corinthians: Cassio - Alessandro, Chicao, Leandro Castan, Fabio Santos, Ralf, Paulinho, Danilo, Alex, Jorge Henrique, Willian (Liedson 46).
Santos: Rafael - Henrique, Edu Dracena, Durval, Juan (Leo 75), Adriano (Elano 74), Arouca, Ganso, Alan Kardec, Neymar, Borges (Dimba 80).

June 21
Universidad de Chile 0
Boca Juniors 0
Ref: Ubriaco (Uru)
Boca 2-0 on agg
Universidad: Herrera - Rodriguez, Gonzalez (Magalhaes 61), Rojas, Mena, Aranguiz, Diaz, Marino, Castro (Ubilla 46), Henriquez, Fernandes (Ruidiaz 73).
Boca: Orion - Roncaglia, Schiavi, Caruzzo, Rodriguez, Ledesma (Rivero 90+2), Somoza, Erviti, Riquelme, Mouche (Cvitanich 75), Silva (Viatri 84).

ARGENTINA

Clausura

June 8: Arsenal 3 Argentinos 1.
June 9: Banfield 1 Boca 1; Velez 2 Rafaela 1; Newell's 2 Independiente 1; Union 0 San Martin 0.
June 10: Tigre 3 San Lorenzo 1; All Boys 3 Estudiantes 1; Olimpo 2 Lanus 2; Godoy Cruz 2 Belgrano 1.
June 11: Racing 1 Colon 1.
June 15: Lanus 0 Union 0; San Martin 2 Newell's 1.
June 16: Belgrano 3 Banfield 1; Estudiantes 1 Olimpo 0; Velez 0 Tigre 1.
June 17: Argentinos 1 All Boys 0; Independiente 0 San Lorenzo 0; Rafaela 4 Racing 2; Boca 0 Arsenal 3.
June 18: Colon 2 Godoy Cruz 0.
June 22: Newell's 0 Lanus 0; Olimpo 0 Argentinos 0.
June 23: Racing 1 Velez 2.
June 24: All Boys 3 Boca 1; Arsenal 1 Belgrano 0; Banfield 0 Colon 3; Godoy Cruz 1 Rafaela 3; San Lorenzo 3 San Martin 1; Tigre 2 Independiente 2; Union 2 Estudiantes 2.

ARGENTINA – CLAUSURA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal (C)	19	11	5	3	30	15	38
Tigre	19	10	6	3	29	15	36
Velez	19	9	6	4	26	15	33
Boca	19	9	6	4	30	20	33
All Boys	19	9	6	4	21	13	33
Newell's	19	9	5	5	26	19	32
Colon	19	7	8	4	24	18	29
Argentinos	19	7	6	6	17	15	27
Estudiantes	19	7	6	6	23	24	27
Lanus	19	7	5	7	19	18	26
Union	19	5	10	4	21	20	25
San Lorenzo[1]	19	6	7	6	22	23	25
Rafaela	19	6	6	7	26	24	24
Belgrano	19	6	6	7	17	20	24
San Martin[1]	19	6	4	9	21	29	22
Independiente	19	5	5	9	22	28	20
Racing	19	5	4	10	19	27	19
Godoy Cruz	19	2	8	9	11	25	14
Olimpo (R)[1]	19	3	4	12	20	34	13
Banfield (R)[1]	19	2	5	12	15	37	11

[1]Olimpo and Banfield were relegated as the 2 teams with the worst average points tallies over the 3 most recent seasons; San Lorenzo and San Martin enter rel/prom play-offs as the teams with the 3rd and 4th worst average tallies

BOLIVIA

BOLIVIA – CLAUSURA – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Strongest (C)	22	11	5	6	47	28	38
San Jose	22	11	5	6	43	27	38
Oriente	22	11	5	6	38	30	38
Universitario	22	11	4	7	34	21	37
Blooming	22	11	4	7	28	23	37
Real Potosi	22	11	2	9	36	32	35
Aurora	22	10	4	8	38	30	34
Nacional	22	10	4	8	33	36	34
Bolivar	22	6	10	6	34	25	28
La Paz[1]	22	7	3	12	29	39	24
Mamore (R)[1]	22	5	3	14	16	47	18
Guabira (R)[1]	22	1	5	16	19	57	8

[1]Mamore were relegated automatically as the team with the worst average points tally in the combined 2011-12 season (adecuacion, apertura & clausura); La Paz and Guabira entered rel/prom play-offs as the teams with the 2nd and 3rd worst average points tallies – La Paz won their play-off to stay up, Guabira lost theirs to go down

BRAZIL

June 6: Sport 2 Palmeiras 1; Goianiense 0 Gremio 1; Vasco 4 Nautico 2; Mineiro 1 Bahia 1; Coritiba 2 Portuguesa 0; Santos 1 Fluminense 1; Internacional 1 Sao Paulo 0; Ponte Preta 2 Flamengo 2.
June 7: Botafogo 2 Cruzeiro 3; Corinthians 1 Figueirense 1.
June 9: Palmeiras 0 Mineiro 1; Flamengo 3 Coritiba 1.
June 10: Portuguesa 2 Goianiense 0; Fluminense 0 Internacional 0; Gremio 2 Corinthians 0; Bahia 1 Vasco 2; Sao Paulo 1 Santos 0; Cruzeiro 1 Sport 0; Figueirense 0 Ponte Preta 0; Nautico 3 Botafogo 2.
June 16: Internacional 1 Botafogo 2; Cruzeiro 1 Figueirense 0; Fluminense 4 Portuguesa 1.

Going up...River Plate's Alejandro Dominguez (left)

ARGENTINA

River return

River Plate returned to the Primera Division after a year's absence with a 2-0 victory at home to Almirante Brown.

Former France striker David Trezeguet scored both goals as River claimed the Primera B Nacional title by one point from Quilmes, who are also promoted.

URUGUAY

Nacional take title

Nacional won their 44th domestic title after beating Defensor Sporting 1-0 in the championship play-off.

An Alvaro Recoba goal in the 41st minute was enough to secure victory for the apertura champions over the clausura winners at the Centenario in Montevideo. The victory gave coach Marcelo Gallardo his first championship success.

At the other end of the table, Rampla Juniors, Cerrito and Rentistas will be playing second division football next year. They are replaced in the top flight by Central Espanol, Juventud and Progreso.

6 players sent off in the Primera game between Argentinos Juniors and All Boys, setting a record for the Argentinian top flight

CLUB FOOTBALL

June 17: Flamengo 1 Santos 0; Palmeiras 1 Vasco 1; Sao Paulo 1 Mineiro 0; Bahia 2 Sport 1; Ponte Preta 1 Corinthians 0; Coritiba 3 Goianiense 0; Nautico 1 Gremio 0.
June 23: Vasco 1 Cruzeiro 3; Portuguesa 1 Sao Paulo 0; Mineiro 5 Nautico 1.
June 24: Corinthians 2 Palmeiras 1; Gremio 2 Flamengo 0; Figueirense 1 Bahia 1; Botafogo 1 Ponte Preta 2; Santos 2 Coritiba 2; Sport 0 Internacional 2; Goianiense 1 Fluminense 4.

BRAZIL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cruzeiro	6	4	2	0	8	3	14
Mineiro	6	4	1	1	9	3	13
Vasco	6	4	1	1	11	8	13
Gremio	6	4	0	2	7	3	12
Fluminense	6	3	3	0	12	5	12
Internacional	6	3	2	1	9	5	11
Botafogo	6	3	0	3	14	13	9
Sao Paulo	6	3	0	3	5	6	9
Flamengo	6	2	3	1	10	9	9
Ponte Preta	6	2	3	1	6	5	9
Coritiba	6	2	1	3	10	10	7
Portuguesa	6	2	1	3	5	8	7
Nautico	6	2	1	3	8	13	7
Figueirense	6	1	4	1	6	6	7
Bahia	6	1	3	2	5	6	6
Sport	6	1	2	3	4	7	5
Corinthians	6	1	1	4	3	7	4
Santos	6	0	4	2	3	5	4
Palmeiras	6	0	2	4	4	8	2
Goianiense	6	0	2	4	2	11	2

38-round season (19x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

URUGUAY

URUGUAY – CLAUSURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Defensor (C)	15	12	2	1	31	11	38
Nacional	15	11	2	2	38	20	35
Liverpool	15	11	1	3	31	21	34
Penarol	15	10	2	3	41	18	32
Cerro Largo	15	8	3	4	28	18	27
Wanderers	15	7	3	5	26	25	24
River Plate	15	6	4	5	28	23	22
Danubio	15	5	6	4	18	18	21
Bella Vista	15	6	2	7	19	21	20
Racing	15	5	2	8	21	30	17
Rampla (R)[1]	15	4	3	8	18	33	15
Tanque Sisley	15	4	1	10	14	25	13
Cerro	15	3	3	9	18	25	12
Cerrito (R)[1]	15	2	5	8	14	29	11
Fenix	15	1	6	8	18	25	9
Rentistas (R)[1]	15	0	5	10	9	30	5

[1]Rampla, Cerrito and Rentistas were relegated as the 3 teams with the worst average points tallies over the 2 most recent seasons

2011-12 championship play-off

(apertura winners, Nacional v clausura winners, Defensor)
June 16 - Montevideo (Centenario)
Nacional 1 (Recoba 41)
Defensor 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ubriaco
**Nacional are 2011-12 champions on the strength of this victory, having also topped the combined apertura/clausura table*

VENEZUELA

VENEZUELA – CLAUSURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lara (C)	17	13	3	1	32	12	42
Mineros	17	9	6	2	29	15	33
Anzoategui	17	9	5	3	21	10	32
Caracas	17	8	4	5	23	20	28
Zulia	17	9	0	8	14	13	27
Llaneros	17	7	5	5	17	14	26
Zamora	17	7	4	6	23	23	25
Trujillanos	17	5	8	4	17	16	23
Aragua	17	5	6	6	16	17	21
Carabobo (R)[1]	17	5	6	6	14	15	21
Tachira	17	5	5	7	18	19	20
Monagas	17	5	5	7	14	15	20
Yaracuyanos	17	5	5	7	18	20	20
Estudiantes	17	4	7	6	17	19	19
Esppor	17	4	6	7	9	14	18
Petare	17	3	7	7	16	22	16
El Vigia	17	4	4	9	11	24	16
Tucanes (R)[1]	17	2	2	13	15	36	8

[1]Carabobo and Tucanes were relegated as the 2 teams with the fewest points in the combined apertura/clausura table

2011-12 championship play-off

Lara won both the apertura and clausura championships to become 2011-12 champions automatically

CONCACAF

UNITED STATES

Regular season

June 2: New England 2 Chicago 0.
June 10: Vancouver 3 Houston 1.
June 16: Philadelphia 0 DC United 1; Vancouver 1 Colorado 0; Houston 2 Dallas 1; Montreal 4 Seattle 1; New England 0 Columbus 0; Kansas City 2 Toronto 0; Chivas 0 Salt Lake 3.
June 17: Chicago 3 New York 1; Los Angeles 1 Portland 0.
June 20: Salt Lake 2 Los Angeles 3; Houston 3 Toronto 3; Colorado 1 San Jose 2; Seattle 1 Kansas City 1; Chivas 2 Montreal 1; Vancouver 1 New York 1.
June 23: Toronto 2 New England 2; Philadelphia 4 Kansas City 0; Montreal 4 Houston 2; Chicago 2 Columbus 1; Salt Lake 1 San Jose 2; Dallas 0 Chivas 0; Los Angeles 3 Vancouver 0.
June 24: Portland 2 Seattle 1; New York 3 DC United 2.

USA – REGULAR: EASTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
DC United	17	9	3	5	31	22	30
New York	16	9	3	4	31	24	30
Kansas City	15	9	2	4	20	15	29
Chicago	15	7	3	5	20	19	24
Houston	15	5	5	5	20	23	20
Columbus	14	5	4	5	14	15	19
New England	15	5	3	7	20	20	18
Montreal	16	5	3	8	24	26	18
Philadelphia	13	3	2	8	12	15	11
Toronto	13	1	2	10	13	28	5

34-round regular season (7x3 & 2x2 in own conference, 9x1 in western conference)

USA – REGULAR: WESTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
San Jose	16	10	3	3	31	19	33
Salt Lake	17	10	2	5	28	19	32
Vancouver	16	7	5	4	18	19	26
Seattle	16	7	4	5	19	16	25
Los Angeles	16	6	2	8	22	23	20
Colorado	15	6	1	8	21	21	19
Chivas	16	5	4	7	11	18	19
Portland	14	4	4	6	14	17	16
Dallas	17	3	5	9	16	26	14

34-round regular season (8x3 in own conference, 10x1 in eastern conference). Top 5 in both conferences will enter championship play-offs; no relegation from this league

AFRICA

CONFEDERATION CUP

1st round

1st legs - Mar 23-25; 2nd legs - Apr 6-9
AC Leopard (Con) v CS Sfaxien (Tun) 1-2, 2-0 (agg 3-2); Black Leopards (SAf) v St Eloi Lupopo (DRC) 4-2, 2-2 (agg 6-4); Etoile Filante (BuF) v ASEC Abidjan (IvC) 2-2, 0-2 (agg 2-4); Ferroviario Maputo (Moz) v Al Ahli Shendi (Sud) 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3); Gamtel (Gam) v Real Bamako (Mli) 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3); Hwange Colliery (Zim) v Amal Atbara (Sud) 1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Amal Atbara on away goals); Invincible Eleven (Lbr) v Wydad Casablanca (Mor) 0-2, 1-4 (agg 1-6); Kallon (SLe) v Warri Wolves (Nga) 0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2); Lydia Academic (Bdi) v ENPPI (Egy) 1-1, 1-4 (agg 2-5); Renaissance (Chd) v CO Bamako (Mli) 3-2, 1-3 (agg 4-5); Royal Leopards (Swa) v Tshinkunku (DRC) 1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2); Sequence (Gui) v COD Meknes (Mor) 0-2, 0-3 (agg 0-5); Simba (Tan) v ES Setif (Alg) 2-0, 1-3 (agg 3-3, Simba on away goals); St George (Eth) v Club Africain (Tun) 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3); Tana (Mad) v InterClube (Ang) 2-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 2-2, InterClube 6-5 on pens); Unisport Bafang (Cam) v Heartland (Nga) 0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)

2nd round

1st legs - Apr 27-29; 2nd legs - May 12/13
ASEC Abidjan v COD Meknes 1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, COD Meknes on away goals); ENPPI v CO Bamako 3-1, 0-3 (agg 3-4); Heartland v AC Leopard 3-2, 1-2 (agg 4-4, AC Leopard on away goals); InterClube v Amal Atbara 4-1, 2-0 (agg 6-1); Royal Leopards v Club Africain 0-1, 2-4 (agg 2-5); Simba v Al Ahli Shendi 3-0, 0-3 (agg 3-3, Al Ahli Shendi 9-8 on pens); Warri Wolves v Black Leopards 3-1, 0-2 (agg 3-3, Black Leopards on away goals); Wydad Casablanca v Real Bamako 3-0, 0-1 (agg 3-1)

MOROCCO

MOROCCO – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Moghreb (C)	30	17	10	3	41	13	61
FUS	30	16	9	5	32	16	57
Wydad C	30	13	12	5	32	18	51
Raja	30	14	9	7	34	24	51
Difaa	30	13	9	8	35	27	48
Maghreb	30	10	11	9	35	26	41
FAR	30	10	11	9	32	29	41
Olympique S	30	9	9	12	34	43	36
Olympique K	30	8	11	11	27	32	35
CODM[1]	30	10	6	14	19	26	35
KAC	30	7	14	9	29	40	35
Hassania	30	8	11	11	22	31	35
Chabab	30	8	9	13	31	27	33
Wydad F	30	7	9	14	26	39	30
JSM (R)	30	7	7	16	24	42	28
Ittihad (R)	30	5	9	16	12	32	24

[1]1pt deducted because of crowd trouble

SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Orlando P's (C)	30	17	7	6	40	26	58
Moroka Sw's	30	15	11	4	48	34	56
SuperSport	30	15	9	6	39	23	54
Mamelodi S's	30	14	10	6	44	23	52
Kaizer Chiefs	30	14	8	8	35	23	50
Free State	30	14	6	10	38	31	48
AmaZulu	30	10	11	9	32	24	41
Bloemfontein	30	11	8	11	36	33	41
Ajax Cape T'n	30	11	7	12	42	49	40
Platinum Stars	30	10	6	14	37	39	36
Maritzburg	30	7	13	10	26	38	34
Wits Univ	30	7	12	11	31	38	33
Golden Arrows	30	9	5	16	40	49	32
Black L'pards	30	7	8	15	36	58	29
Santos[1]	30	7	6	17	34	48	27
Jomo C'os (R)	30	2	13	15	24	46	19

[1]Santos enter rel/prom play-offs

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round

Single-leg ties
May 22: Al Jazira (UAE) 3 Al Ahli (Sau) 3 (aet, Al Ahli 4-2 on pens); Sepahan (Irn) 2 Esteghlal (Irn) 0.
May 23: Al Hilal (Sau) 7 Bani Yas (UAE) 1; Al Ittihad (Sau) 3 Persepolis (Irn) 0.
May 29: Adelaide United (Aus) 1 Nagoya Grampus (Jap) 0; Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma (SKo) 0 Bunyodkor (Uzb) 1.
May 30: Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn) 1 Tokyo (Jap) 0; Ulsan Hyundai (SKo) 3 Kashiwa Reysol (Jap) 2.

Quarter-finals draw

Adelaide United v Bunyodkor
Al Ittihad v Guangzhou Evergrande
Sepahan v Al Ahli
Ulsan Hyundai v Al Hilal
1st legs - Sep 19; 2nd legs - Oct 2/3

AFC CUP

AFC CUP – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Qad'a (Kuw)	6	3	1	2	14	7	10
Al Suw'q (Oma)	6	3	1	2	8	9	10
Al Faisaly (Jor)	6	2	3	1	10	7	9
Al Ittihad (Syr)	6	1	1	4	5	14	4

AFC CUP – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arbil (Irq)	6	4	2	0	11	5	14
Kazma (Kuw)	6	3	2	1	10	6	11
Al Or'ba (Yem)	6	2	2	2	10	8	8
E Bengal (Ind)	6	0	0	6	2	14	0

AFC CUP – GROUP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ettifaq (Sau)	6	4	2	0	18	7	14
Kuw't SC (Kuw)	6	3	2	1	17	10	11
Al Ahed (Leb)	6	2	1	3	7	11	7
VB Addu (Mdv)	6	0	1	5	9	23	1

AFC CUP – GROUP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Wehdat (Jor)	6	4	0	2	15	9	12
Neftchi (Uzb)	6	3	2	1	11	7	11
Al Ar'ba (Oma)	6	2	1	3	8	10	7
Salgaocar (Ind)	6	1	1	4	6	14	4

Match winner...Recoba

AUSTRALIA

New Wanderers

The A-League's newest club will be known as Western Sydney Wanderers. The team – who will be coached by former Australia international Tony Popovic – will replace Gold Coast United, who had their licence terminated in February, when the new season starts on October 5.

BAHRAIN

Diego beaten

Al Muharraq completed a remarkable comeback to win the Gulf Clubs Champions League, reversing a 3-1 first-leg defeat to force extra time and then win on penalties in the Final against Al Wasl, ensuring Diego Maradona's first season in charge at the UAE club ended trophyless.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

League expands

The Pro League will expand from 12 to 24 clubs next season. The two bottom clubs from last term, Sharjah and Emirates, will enter into a play-off with the third- and fourth-ranked sides from the second tier, Al Dhafra and Al Shaab, to determine the final two teams for the 2012-13 top flight.

AFC CUP – GROUP E – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Shorta (Syr)	6	5	0	1	14	6	15
Al Zawra'a (Irq)	6	4	0	2	12	5	12
Safa (Leb)	6	3	0	3	6	7	9
Al Tilal (Yem)	6	0	0	6	1	15	0

AFC CUP – GROUP F – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kitchee (HK)	6	3	2	1	9	4	11
Tereng'u (Mly)	6	3	1	2	10	8	10
Song Lam (Vie)	6	2	1	3	6	9	7
Tampines (Sin)	6	1	2	3	3	7	5

AFC CUP – GROUP G – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chonburi (Tha)	6	4	2	0	10	5	14
Home (Sin)	6	3	1	2	9	6	10
Citizen (HK)	6	2	1	3	9	12	7
Yangon (Mym)	6	0	2	4	4	9	2

AFC CUP – GROUP H – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kelantan (Mly)	6	4	1	1	10	5	13
Arema (Ins)	6	2	1	3	12	12	7
Navibank (Vie)	6	2	1	3	10	12	7
Ay'wady (Mym)	6	2	1	3	7	10	7

Top 2 in each group qualified for 1st knockout round

1st knockout round

Single-leg ties

May 22: Al Ettifaq 1 Al Suwaiq 0; Al Qadsia 1 Kuwait SC 1 (aet, Kuwait SC 3-1 on pens); Al Shorta 3 Home United 0; Chonburi 1 Al Zawra'a 0.
May 23: Al Wehdat 2 Kazma 1 (aet); Arbil 4 Neftchi 0; Kelantan 3 Terengganu 2; Kitchee 0 Arema 2.

Quarter-finals draw

Arbil v Kelantan
Arema v Al Ettifaq
Chonburi v Al Shorta
Kuwait SC v Al Wehdat
1st legs - Sep 18; 2nd legs - Sep 24/25

IRAN

IRAN – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sepahan (C)	34	19	10	5	54	27	67
Tractor	34	19	9	6	57	32	66
Esteghlal	34	19	9	6	58	34	66
Saba	34	12	14	8	40	38	50
Naft	34	13	10	11	36	38	49
Zob Ahan	34	9	18	7	29	33	45
Damash	34	11	11	12	34	38	44
Saipa	34	10	13	11	50	39	43
Mes Kerman	34	11	10	13	35	39	43
Sanat	34	11	10	13	49	57	43
Rah Ahan	34	9	15	10	43	42	42
Persepolis	34	10	12	12	50	54	42
Fajr	34	10	11	13	31	38	41
Foolad	34	10	10	14	35	37	40
Malavan	34	9	12	13	32	33	39
Shahrdari (R)	34	6	16	12	34	44	34
Shahin (R)	34	6	15	13	30	43	33
Mes S'me (R)	34	5	9	20	23	54	24

JAPAN

Apr 28: Nagoya 1 Urawa 2; Tokyo 0 Shimizu 1; Kashiwa 1 Sagan 1; Kawasaki 1 Sanfrecce 4; Kashima 5 Gamba 0; Albirex 0 Vegalta 1; Yokohama 3 Vissel 1; Omiya 2 Consadole 1; Cerezo 3 Jubilo 2.
May 3: Vissel 3 Omiya 0; Consadole 1 Cerezo 0; Kawasaki 4 Jubilo 3; Sagan 1 Vegalta 1; Sanfrecce 0 Albirex 1; Shimizu 3 Kashima 0; Urawa 1 Yokohama 2.
May 6: Cerezo 1 Vissel 2; Yokohama 2 Consadole 1; Vegalta 0 Shimizu 1; Kashiwa 2 Sanfrecce 5; Jubilo 2 Urawa 2; Nagoya 2 Kawasaki 3; Omiya 1 Gamba 0; Albirex 0 Tokyo 2; Kashima 0 Sagan 0.
May 12: Consadole 0 Tokyo 1; Jubilo 3 Kashima 0; Sagan 1 Omiya 1; Kawasaki 0 Kashiwa 2; Sanfrecce 1 Yokohama 3; Shimizu 1 Cerezo 1; Urawa 1 Albirex 1; Vissel 0 Nagoya 1; Gamba 1 Vegalta 1.
May 19: Yokohama 0 Gamba 0; Sanfrecce 3 Vissel 2; Albirex 1 Jubilo 6; Urawa 1 Shimizu 0; Omiya 0 Kawasaki 2; Kashima 7 Consadole 0; Vegalta 4 Nagoya 0; Cerezo 1 Kashiwa 2.
May 20: Tokyo 3 Sagan 2.
May 25: Gamba 2 Sagan 3; Nagoya 0 Cerezo 1.
May 26: Consadole 1 Sanfrecce 3; Jubilo 4 Omiya 0; Kawasaki 3 Vegalta 2; Shimizu 0 Yokohama 0; Vissel 1 Kashima 2; Kashiwa 2 Albirex 0; Tokyo 1 Urawa 1.
June 16: Vegalta 4 Consadole 1; Kashima 2 Nagoya 3; Omiya 2 Kashiwa 4; Yokohama 1 Tokyo 0; Albirex 1 Shimizu 0; Jubilo 1 Vissel 3; Gamba 1 Urawa 2; Cerezo 1 Sanfrecce 4; Sagan 0 Kawasaki 1.
June 23: Consadole 0 Gamba 4; Tokyo 2 Cerezo 0; Shimizu 1 Sagan 1; Kashiwa 1 Kashima 1; Sanfrecce 0 Omiya 0; Urawa 0 Vegalta 0; Kawasaki 0 Yokohama 0; Nagoya 2 Jubilo 0; Vissel 1 Albirex 0.

JAPAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vegalta	15	9	4	2	31	13	31
Sanfrecce	15	9	2	4	30	16	29
Urawa	15	7	5	3	19	14	26
Kawasaki	15	8	2	5	22	21	26
Tokyo	14	8	1	5	17	14	25
Jubilo	15	7	3	5	31	22	24
Shimizu	15	7	3	5	16	13	24
Nagoya	14	7	2	5	20	19	23
Yokohama	15	5	7	3	15	12	22
Sagan	15	5	6	4	16	13	21
Kashiwa	14	6	3	5	24	22	21
Vissel	15	7	0	8	21	23	21
Kashima	15	5	3	7	23	21	18
Cerezo	15	5	2	8	17	21	17
Omiya	15	4	4	7	13	26	16
Gamba	14	3	3	8	20	27	12
Albirex	15	3	3	9	8	20	12
Consadole	15	1	1	13	10	36	4

34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

SAUDI ARABIA

SAUDI ARABIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Shabab (C)	26	19	7	0	50	16	64
Al Ahli	26	19	5	2	60	22	62
Al Hilal	26	18	6	2	58	22	60
Al Ettifaq	26	13	8	5	41	26	47
Al Ittihad	26	10	7	9	49	35	37
Al Fateh	26	10	7	9	37	41	37
Al Nasr	26	10	5	11	40	37	35
Al Faisaly	26	7	9	10	36	41	30
Najran	26	7	9	10	34	49	30
Al Raed	26	8	4	14	28	39	28
Hajer	26	6	7	13	23	45	25
Al Taawon	26	4	7	15	28	52	19
Al Qadisiya (R)	26	4	6	16	34	52	18
Al Ansar (R)	26	3	1	22	19	60	10

SOUTH KOREA

SOUTH KOREA – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jeonbuk	17	11	3	3	40	20	36
Suwon	17	11	3	3	30	13	36
Seoul	17	10	5	2	24	13	35
Jeju	17	8	5	4	29	20	29
Ulsan	17	8	4	5	23	17	28
Busan	17	7	6	4	15	11	27
Pohang	17	7	4	6	17	16	25
Daegu	17	7	4	6	20	23	25
Seongnam	18	6	3	9	16	23	21
Chunnam	17	5	6	6	14	21	21
Gyeongnam	18	6	2	10	21	28	20
Gwangju	17	4	6	7	26	29	18
Daejeon	17	5	2	10	14	23	17
Sangju	17	4	2	11	18	28	14
Gangwon	17	4	2	11	16	29	14
Incheon	17	2	7	8	11	20	13

Standings on June 26
30-round regular season (15x2); top 8 will form championship group, bottom 8 will form relegation group (from which the bottom 2 will go down)

OCEANIA

NEW ZEALAND

NEW ZEALAND – REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland	14	11	3	0	43	11	36
Canterbury	14	9	2	3	38	12	29
Waitakere	14	9	0	5	44	17	27
T Wellington	14	8	2	4	33	18	26
Hawkes Bay	14	6	1	7	28	35	19
Otago	14	3	2	9	15	37	11
Waikato	14	2	3	9	17	39	9
YoungHeart	14	0	3	11	12	61	3

Top 4 entered championship play-offs; no relegation from this league

Semi-finals

1st legs - Apr 15; 2nd legs - Apr 22
Team Wellington v Auckland 1-0, 3-1 (agg 4-1)
Waitakere v Canterbury 0-1, 5-2 (agg 5-3)

Final

Apr 28 - Auckland (Trusts)
Waitakere 4 (Krishna 45+1, 89, Pearce 77, Butler 84)
Team Wellington 1 (Fa'arodo 85)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 2,500. **Ref:** Waldron

KEY TO TABLES

(C) = champions (R) = relegated

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

July 6, 7 and 8
African Champions League group stage starts
July 15
European Under-19 Championship Final
July 26 to August 11
Olympic Games football tournament
July 31
CONCACAF Champions League group stage starts

July 2012 Vol 52 No 11

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Thanks this issue to Mike Hughes, Peter Neish, Dave Rallis

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Periodicals paid at Rahway, NJ Postmaster: send address changes to *World Soccer*, c/o MAIL America, 365 Blair Road, Avenel NJ 07001, USA. USPS004075

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Your team-by-team guide to the new season in Europe

Expert analysis of Europe's top leagues

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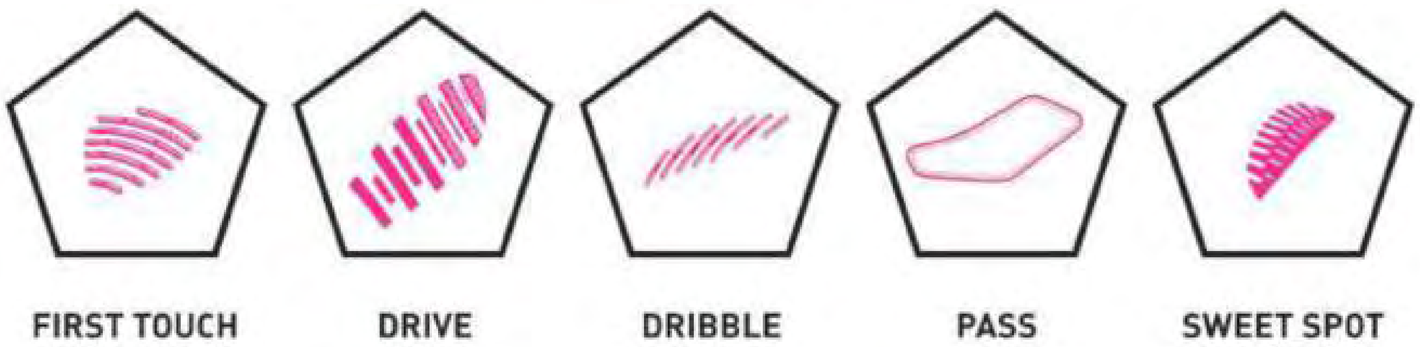

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